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The University of Southern Mississippi

INTERPERSONAL (RE) RELATING: INVESTIGATING THE
EXPERIENCE OF REFRIENDING

by

Paul Edgerton Stafford

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2013

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This study reveals findings from qualitative research investigating the relational experience of friends reconnecting after a long period of disconnect. Borrowed from the lexicon of social networking terminology, this particular process is conceptualized here as a process of *refriending*: when two individuals whose interactive behavior and shared lived experiences that once characterized their friendship have reestablished contact and are interacting after an extended period of communication dormancy. A content analysis of 15 participant interviews about their refriending experiences resulted in a typology of 12 thematic categories related to identity, disclosure, motivation, and communication competence. Aspects of relational continuity as well as the dialectical/dialogic implications of refriending are also explored.

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Submitted to the Graduate School
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PREFACE

On this particular Saturday night, I sat on my living room floor with absolutely nothing to do. Still a bit disoriented after reading the hundred-or-so pages for next weeks' classes, I leaned back against the couch, arms out wide for a much needed stretch when my phone lit up with a number from Portland, Oregon. I stared at the number on the screen with a curious look; who do I know in Portland, Oregon? Typically I let such phone calls go to voicemail, but on this night I pushed the answer button. "Hello?" I offered with some hesitation.

A voice answered, "Hello, is this Paul?"

"This is Paul," I said, "Who is this?"

"This is..." but before he said his name I recognized the voice on the other end of the line, "...Kevin Sanders."

"Kevin Sanders! I don't believe it. What on God's green earth are you up to?" A memory flashed in my mind of Kevin laughing on the school bus wearing red parachute pants tucked into his blue high-top Adidas. We met as high school sophomores 27 years ago after my family moved from rural Jenks, Oklahoma to big city Houston, Texas, and became fast friends who shared a common interest in all things rock and roll.

"Well, I just wanted to know what you were up to?" he said. Then I remembered the last time we spoke was at a friend's house, New Year's Eve 1990, just before I left Houston to attend school out in West Texas. I have a vivid memory from that evening of me and Kevin standing on the front lawn staring up at the night sky, marveling at the fact we were entering "The Nineties!" Had it really been that long?

“I’ve been up to a lot, actually. How’d you find my number?” Not sure why I asked this question at this particular time, perhaps a reaction from the shock of the past suddenly careening into the present. He explained that he first tried to locate me through Facebook, but found nothing.

“Yeah, I just recently deactivated my account.” I said. “I want to revamp some things before I put it back up. I just don’t do Facebook very much, really.” This was true. So many people I know (and the world at large) spend hours everyday on Facebook posting, responding, reading; I just don’t see the appeal. I consider myself a social person with a large network of friends and a family I adore, and when apart we usually interact through email, phone calls, and even text messages. I suppose the real reason I don’t “do” Facebook is because I’m hesitant to subscribe to popular appeal; a particular attitude I picked up back in high school from Kevin.

He continued: “When I didn’t find anything on Facebook, I Googled your name and found a blurb about you as a grad student at State. I thought about sending you an email to your school address, but then I remembered we exchanged phone numbers back when MySpace was still going, so I thought I’d just pick up the phone and call.”

I remembered that we did exchange phones numbers almost ten years ago, but we didn’t take time to chat.

“Wow!” I breathed, “This is a trip!” Again, I could have thought of something better to say here, but I was taken by surprise at the swiftness of this relational moment. After 23 years, I was talking with a friend who I shared many experiences with, good and bad, but we were always there for one another. I never intended to lose contact with

Kevin. I thought about him frequently over the years and always knew that someday we would meet again and hopefully pick up where we left off. That day was here.

Over the next hour and a half, we took turns talking about where our lives had gone since we last spoke. I remember he took the first turn, talking about his college experience that led him to a career as a high school music teacher. He gushed with pride over his wife and family, but I could hear the sadness in voice when he talked about the recent passing of his father. I told him my father had also died and found myself holding back a tear over a sudden memory of he and Kevin laughing in our kitchen. Kevin liked my dad very much.

At this point, I took a turn. He was happy to know that my mom was doing well, living close to my brothers back in Texas. I filled him in about my own protracted academic career and my goal to become a college professor. He asked questions along the way and every so often one of us would start in with, “Do you remember the time...?” or “Whatever happened to...?” I saw him in my mind as he spoke and composed a picture of what I thought he looked like on the other end of the phone. He sounded and acted like the old Kevin I used to know, cracking jokes with the same sense of humor punctuated with his familiar, breathy laugh. We talked mostly about our own lives with little mention of worldly matters outside our friendship. Time seemed to fly by, and soon we were saying our goodbyes, but not before making plans to see each other in the near future. I told him the best way to get in touch with me was through email or phone, and we exchanged addresses. I was thrilled that Kevin was back in my life, and I can report here that we exchange emails quite regularly.

This experience of reconnecting with Kevin served as the impetus for the project unfolding in the pages ahead. After our conversation, I wondered about other friends of mine who seemed to disappear over the years. Some I do not care to know again, but there are others whose friendship was once of great importance, but now, unexplainably, we have drifted apart. We were close friends; we are no longer. We interacted daily, weekly; we have not spoken at length for many years. We have grown up and grown apart, now tied to one another through memories of shared experiences. My reconnection with Kevin activated a number of cognitive and emotional responses, and I wondered how other people experience reconnecting with old friends. How do the shared experiences of a past friendship work toward reestablishing the relationship in the present? Is there value in reconnecting past friendships? How do individuals communicatively move back and forth between the familiar and unfamiliar aspects of the friendship? These and other questions are explored in the following pages about people's experiences of refriending.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most of us can claim a connection to someone else, a personal bond we share with a parent, grandparent, sibling, or another individual we call family. These kinds of relationships remain with us throughout our lives, identified through our membership to a family. For many of us, these connections take precedence over all other relationships for it is through family our identity is born and where we first learn to forge relationships with others. We cannot fully cast off our association to family though try as some of us might, for we are forever an artifact of lineage, a temporal embodiment of DNA and blood ties representative of distal relationships and the social milieu of our kindred upbringing.

Romantic relationships provide the spark for our familial torch. The enterprise of love sets in motion an array of relational challenges caught up in the ebb and flow of emotional bonding and physical intimacy. As a symbolic recognition of two people's lifelong commitment to each other, marriage most often casts the dye of one's familial heritage; an institution recognized and bestowed through the ceremonial declaration of two people's love for one another. There is a legal bond galvanized through the exchange of *I do's* where the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife are evident and expected.

Friendships, however, offer a different type of relational membership based on the willingness of two people volunteering their time and commitment to one another. Friends are not bound together by blood or by name; they do not necessarily belong to one another, but they can prove inseparable. Friends can love each other, but this kind

love emanates from admiration for spirit and the quality of character the other possesses. Like all relational partners, friends give and take, surprise and expect, protect and attack. Friends can be like family, or simply the neighbor across the street. In whatever capacity they may serve, friendships are complex relationships where individuals co-construct the nature of the relationship in the same role as the other, that of friend (Paine, 1969).

Together, friends form a bond fully articulated and understood only as friends themselves; a partnership whose characteristics they share are as common as they are unique. In this way, the bond they rely on is tested over the life of the friendship as each individual mediates the push and pull of competing relationships and daily responsibilities impinging on their time and devotion to one another. The project at hand focuses on what happens when friends fade into the backdrop of lived experiences only to return one day in search of the other. As way of sketching out the finer points of this study in these opening pages, it is helpful to articulate a philosophical basis for understanding friendship, and who better to provide such a foundation than Aristotle.

Not only did Aristotle's writings initiate centuries of scholarship in the areas of logic, metaphysics, biology, political science, and human communication, he also dedicated a portion of his treatise, *Nicomachean Ethics*, to the subject of friendship. Aristotle proposed that man engages in three different types of friendship. The first two types, friendships for utility and friendships for pleasure, "have no Friendship for one another really, but only in so far as some good arises to them from one another (Chase, 1950, p. 197). Here, the motive for friendship revolves less around the love of a friend for him or herself, but rather on the conditional usefulness of that person, such as asking a friend for a favor, or sharing in some kind of activity. The third type, complete

friendships, acknowledge the utility and pleasure that friendship affords but most importantly, realize “those are specially friends who wish good to their friends for their own sake . . . and not as a mere matter of result” (Chase, 1950, p. 199). The mutual love and respect each has for the other creates an enduring, yet rare type of friendship for these relationships require rare individuals who accept one another unconditionally (Chase, 1950). On the way to further exploring these different kinds of friendships, the review of literature in chapter two begins with a broad discussion of relationships examining their inherent merits and varied concepts as the building blocks of our individual social worlds. The conversation then opens into friendship, pulling apart the different definitions and key characteristics to articulate the familiar yet distinguishing qualities of this kind of relationship.

Aristotle also suggested that friendships, especially those he identified as complete friendships, need “time and intimacy” (Chase, 1950, p. 200) to grow. A necessary condition for their development and continued sustenance relies on “kindly feelings” (Chase, 1950 p. 197) toward one another that are “mutually known” (Chase, 1950, p. 197). These are benevolent friendships built from the open exchange of trust and a genuine regard for the other. Conversely, friendships for utility and pleasure “form and dissolve . . . rapidly” (Chase, 1950, p. 199) when the superficial benefits that drew the two individuals together no longer provide reward or gratification. His ideas of friendship formation and deterioration are revealed in contemporary communication studies as particular processes reflective of how friends maintain their connection to one another in response to a number of factors (e.g. distance, time spent together) influencing the

relationship. The review of literature will examine more closely these factors followed by a discussion of the prominent theoretical perspectives found in friendship studies.

As mentioned above, Aristotle held that complete friendships are built on the reciprocal exchange of goodwill for one another and “Friendship between these men continues to subsist so long as they are good: and goodness, we know has in it a principle of permanence” (Chase, 1950 p. 199). He recognized the importance of sharing time and activities together as necessary ingredients for sustaining friendship, but he also noted that distance and reduced conversation could interrupt efforts to sustain the relationship and could ultimately contribute to its demise. The majority of research in this direction has centered on how individuals cope in long distance romantic relationships (e.g. Sahlstein 2004), with some attention paid to long distance friendships (e.g. Johnson, Becker, Craig, Gilchrist, & Haigh, 2009), but there is nothing in the friendship literature that speaks to the interaction(s) that transpires between friends reconnecting after years of separation. As a valuable contribution to the existing friendship (and overall interpersonal) literature, this research will shed light on the experience of communicating as process of (re) relating.

Wilmot (1994) outlined a model of relationship rejuvenation that explores to “the process of improving a relationship that has gone through a period of decline” (p. 255) where one individual has committed some kind of disapproving act the leads the other to avoid or terminate the relationship. This model, however, does not address those friendships whose disconnection is not due to conflict or unacceptable behaviors. This might be due to the perception that friends who have not remained in contact for a long period of time are no longer friends, as McCall (1988) stated, “Friendships that have

undergone years of separation are essentially ‘missing in action’ and can only be ‘presumed dead’” (p. 477). While this may appear to be true, many relationships do experience a reconnection after long periods of disconnect. For example, siblings separated during childhood find each other as adults; colleagues who used to work together years ago suddenly reestablish their relationship in a new context; military veterans who served together when they were younger now find each other and reinstate their relationship. These may be novel experiences, but they can also prove to be powerful communicative events when a voice from the past reemerges in the present, inviting us to account for our current self in light of the former one. Aristotle also recognized the value of friends gone by stating, “Surely he must keep some memory of the familiarity they had . . . we should accord something to past friends because of the former friendship” (Irwin, 1985, p. 244). The aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of friends reconnecting after an extended period of little to no interaction.

Reconnecting with a friend can occur in a number of different ways such as through a face-to-face encounter, phone call, email, or by written letter. No doubt the opportunity to reconnect has been made easier with the advent of Facebook, the ubiquitous social networking site that hosts more than 800 million users in 70 different languages with the 75% of its users living outside the United States (“Facebook Statistics,” 2012). With so many people dialed into the global phenomenon of Facebook, making new friends online, keeping in contact with current friends, and locating and reconnecting with old friends has become a popular pastime. One advantage of Facebook is that it allows for user autonomy where a person can control who sees their personal information and, more importantly, who they accept as a friend. Here, the term *friend* is

the key linguistic component that defines the Facebook experience. For example, to *friend* a person on Facebook means that one person has accepted another into their online network of contacts (Friend, n.d.); while *defriending* designates the removal of a particular individual from one's Facebook account (Unfriend, n.d.). To *refriend* a person means to add a friend again after accidentally defriending him or her, however, for this study the word refriending is captured and redefined to explore the process of genuine friendship reconnection.

This particular communicative event hosts an array of (re) relating challenges when the past becomes embodied in the present as friends reclaim shared experiences while assimilating new information with what they already know about each other. Thus, genuine refriending is conceptualized here as a process when two individuals whose interactive behavior and shared lived experiences that once characterized their friendship have reestablished contact and are interacting after an extended period of communication dormancy. Part of identifying and understanding a refriending event will not be uncovered until people share their own reconnection experiences, but at the very least, each person still recognizes the other as friend and engages in a back and forth retelling of his or her life. The refriending experience may not so much be defined by the amount of time spent “catching up” but from the resonating meaning the individual ascribes to the experience of reclaiming the friendship. Even after years of protracted silence, some friendships might be able to pick up where they last left off as both friends slip back into their familiar roles that defined their earlier relationship. Others friends may find it more difficult to conjure the social and emotional ties that once bound them together and struggle to find commonality in the moment. Investigating these refriending experiences

will reveal the nuances of communicating identity and change as a unique interpersonal event quite different from the “gray everydayness of relational routines” (Goodall & Kellett, 2004, p. 161).

While the refriending experience is such a particular and personal event, it is not an uncommon one. The method of inquiry designed for this study sets about exploring the refriending process by talking with people about their refriending experiences and interpreting their responses to explicate the nuances of this communicative event. Most of us have wondered about certain friends from our past, especially those with whom we considered close or best friends but our desire to satisfy such curiosity certainly differs from person to person. Understanding our motivation to refriend (or not to refriend) will shed light on the importance we place on past interpersonal relationships and what they do for us in the present. Much has been written about new relationship development, but there is ample room to explore how this is communicatively accomplished as a process of (re) development from the perspectives of both friend and stranger. What tensions are wrapped up in the dialectical push and pull of these perspectives? How is this achieved in different contexts (e.g. face-to-face; online), and what becomes of these friendships after refriending process is over? This study will contribute to our understanding of these dialectical moments of (re) relating across different contexts.

Examining the refriending event as context for a particular kind of interpersonal communication process might also provide an application component. Many of us may have a desire to reconnect with an old friend but simply might be lost on how to initiate such a task. In addition to understanding the decisions involved in rendering this desire into action, it will be helpful to explore how others first made contact, or the choices they

made in their response to a friend reaching out from the past. Is there method buried in the assimilation of these experiences that might reveal a “best practices” approach to refriending? A recent online CNN article (Bartz & Ehrlich, 2011) filed as a *Netiquette* feature suggested tactful ways for people to contact old friends, work buddies, and ex-romantic partners without being “awkward or creepy.” No doubt the current investigation will provide a more concentrated focus in this direction applicable to computer-mediated-communication as well as a face-to-face context.

In sum, this study will focus on people’s experiences of refriending as an interpersonal process of re (relating). Participants will be interviewed about these experiences and their responses analyzed for thematic patterns to shed light on this particular type of interpersonal communication event. The proceeding chapter will provide an overview of the core values and communication processes revealed in friendship research followed by a chapter detailing the method designed to study the refriending experience.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Friendship is difficult to define because it is a relationship that takes on many degrees of variability. No one definition encompasses the full range of idiosyncratic complexities that captures the quality of friendship. It is a social institution bound by no legal document and no official decree exists to mark the bond that is friendship. A friend may function as merely an office mate during working hours or more profoundly as a life-long companion. So too does the number of friendships vary from person to person as well as the degree to which a person considers another a friend or best friend. This review of literature examines the prevailing friendship literature, first offering different friendship definitions. Next, the various aspects of friendship maintenance are reviewed followed by friendship development and termination. Finally, a review of the different dialectical positions related to friendship are offered.

Conceptions of Relationships

Before exploring the different concepts of relationships, a question is first posed: Why do we need relationships? To answer this, Weiss (1974) offered several provisions of relationships, suggesting first that relationships offer a sense of belonging. Weiss introduced the term ‘reliable alliance’ to characterize a trusted and unwavering bond essential to belonging and acceptance in a relationship. Second, relationships allow for emotional integration and stability. As individuals interact and respond to another their expressed opinions and beliefs work to stabilize (or destabilize) our sense of self and “help us to see where we stand *vis-à-vis* other people and whether we are ‘doing OK’” (Duck, 1991, p. 15). Third, relationships provide opportunities for communication

(Weiss, 1974). The short, mundane exchanges of everyday occurrences as well as longer, in-depth conversations are significant to relationships because they allow for self-expression that so often flows freely between both friends and strangers (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991; Duck, 1991). Fourth, relationships provide assistance and physical support that meet physical and psychological needs. For instance, helping a friend move across town requires physical support, while individuals who exchange gifts exemplify psychological support of mutual caring and reciprocity (Duck, 1991). Fifth, relationships help to bolster our self worth and provide opportunities to be there for others in time of need. A friend may directly reassure another's self esteem, for example, by supporting an opinion or even as simply complimenting on a choice of wardrobe. Also, a friend who chooses to spend time with someone over someone else indirectly reassures our self worth (Duck, 1991). Finally, Weiss (1974) observed that relationships provide personality support. Duck (1991) stated that "Our personalities are composed not only of our behavioral style (for example, our introversion or extraversion) but also our thoughts, doubts, and beliefs" (p. 24). When we are wrong a friend helps us to see our mistakes, and when we are right a friend helps to reaffirm our beliefs and self-esteem (Duck, 1991).

An abundance of conceptual observations exist to explain the dynamic and tailored relationship negotiated between friends. For a relationship to exist, Hinde (1979) suggested that interactions between individuals must be ongoing and consistent over time where past interactions affect present and future interactions. Like most interpersonal relationships, friendship revolves around the interdependence between two participants in a dyad where the motives, behavior, and experiences are mutually recognized by and reciprocally influence both individuals (Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997; Kelley, 1979).

Friendship, then, is “multi-faceted . . . showing the total human being, freely trusting and self-disclosed through confidant exchanges” (Lopata & Maines, 1981, p. viii). Hartup (1975) stated, “Friends are people who spontaneously seek the company of another; furthermore, they seek proximity in the absence of strong social pressure to do so” (p. 11). Donelson and Gullahorn (1977) stressed the reciprocal nature and the strength of friendship over time while Reisman (1979) observed how “good intentions are reciprocated by the other party” (p. 93-94).

Types of Friendships

In an effort to distinguish between different categories of companionship dyads, Reisman (1981) identified three types of dyadic friendships: reciprocal, associative, and receptive. The reciprocal dimension adheres to the traditional concept of friendship characterized by loyalty, commitment, and a perception of equality between the individuals in the dyad. The notion of equality moves friends beyond acting as merely role players and accepts each other as whole people, constituting ‘real friendship’ (Suttles, 1970, p. 99; Kurth, 1970). Associative friendships develop through convenience, typically from work settings, with little desire for durability. Receptive friendships exhibit inequality where one individual in the dyad gives more than the other, marking a difference in friend status. This three-tier typology of friendship posited by Reisman demonstrates the complexity of trying to define the different types of relationships within friendship.

Hess (1972) acknowledged that friendships vary from those that are intimate and highly involved (e.g. best friends) to friendships that are more narrowly defined and distinct (e.g. drinking buddies). In a study (Hays, 1989) of friendships among college

students, close friends reported more interaction opportunities across varied settings and provided more emotional and informational support than casual friends. Finally, Du Bois (1974) delineated between exclusive, close, and casual friends. Exclusive friendships revolve primarily around dyads exhibiting inclusive intimacy (i.e., trust and reliability), and solidarity; close friends exist across multiple dyads with selective intimacy and desired durability, while casual friendships operate across a greater range of relationship and exhibit little intimacy and less of a desire for sustainability (Du Bois, 1974; Gareis, 1999).

Key Aspects of Friendships

Compared to love relationships, Wright (1985) found that friendships do not elicit the same kind of intense emotional expression as do romantic relationships and are less exclusive. Yet, friendships are fragile, unbound by contract or institutional recognition and thus can be terminated by either individual at any time (Hess, 1972). Along these lines, Davis and Todd (1985) found that subjects distinguishing between friends and lovers indicated that while love signifies sexual desire and an expectation for commitment, they also identified friendships as more stable than romantic relationships.

Rawlins (1992) also referred to the voluntary and personal aspects in his conception of friendship and tied them to -mutuality, -equality, and the -development of affective ties that exist between friends (e.g. positive feelings, caring). Hays (1988) offered an expansive definition of friendship as a “voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, that is intended to facilitate social-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance” (p. 395). Hays (1988) supported this definition with

four underlying premises. First, the goal-oriented nature of friendships will vary according to the characteristics of each individual (e.g. sex, age), how the friendship develops (e.g. casual versus close relationships), and environmental factors (e.g. social networks, work). Second, because friendships exist simultaneously on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional levels, every friendship will express differently these multidimensional qualities. Third, the dynamic process of friendship means that the characteristic properties of a particular friendship are constantly evolving. Finally, in studying this dynamic process the unit of analysis centers on the friendship dyad rather than on the individuals themselves (Hays, 1988).

The preceding scholarly definitions emphasize a voluntary and interdependent focus of friendship that provides socio-emotional support for both participants. In the social world, people perceive friendships in similar ways. For example, Furman and Bierman (1983) used interviews and picture recognition to elicit conceptions of friendship from children ages four to seven years old. Common activities, affection, support, propinquity, and physical characteristics were found most salient toward conceptualizing friendship. However, the six to seven year-olds reported propinquity and physical characteristics as less important while affection and support were found more salient than in the four and five year olds. In a similar study, Furman and Bierman (1984) garnered similar responses from second, fourth, and sixth graders who identified support, propinquity, intimacy, similarity and affection as salient features of friendship. The older students, however, provided more abstract concepts than did the younger students, suggesting that as age increases so do respondents developmental conceptions of friendship (Furman & Bierman, 1984).

In adolescence, two relational features of friendship become more pronounced: loyalty and intimacy (Fehr, 1996). When asked to describe a best friend, 13 and 16 year-olds mentioned intimacy, loyalty, and authenticity more frequently than 9 year olds (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980). In terms of gender differences when conceptualizing friendship, 23% of girls mentioned intimacy compared to only 9% in boys, and this trend increased to 60% and 40% respectively by the age of 16. Interestingly, girls reported less likely to share with classmates than they would with friends while boys showed no preference between classmates and friends. Moreover, girls are less willing to make new friends if they already have a reciprocated friendship that supports intimacy and exclusivity as salient features in girls' friendships (Berndt, 1982).

Adults retain many of the same integral aspects of friendships as adolescents when conceptualizing friendship. When respondents ages 19-29 were asked, "What does friendship mean to you?" 35% indicated the reciprocal exchange of dependability, caring, commitment and trust as most important, followed by compatibility, openness, acceptance and similarity (Tesch & Martin, 1983). In terms of gender difference, Parker and de Vries (1993) found that friendships among men revolve around more shared activities while exhibiting less emotional communication and support. Not surprisingly, women indicated more appreciation, empathy, and responsibility in their friendships with other women. Both men and women indicated trust and authenticity were the two most valuable friendship aspects while age and sex of friend were rated the lowest. Another study asked elderly participants to define friendship, revealing devotion, reciprocity and a desire to have friends as the primary conceptual attributes associated with older adult friendships (Patterson, Bettini, & Nussbaum, 1993).

These defining qualities and varied conceptions of friendship suggest that the relationship is governed by certain assumptions recognized by both individuals. In an effort to identify generalized expectations of friendship, Argyle and Henderson (1984) offered a number of hypotheses in this direction. From an inventory of 43 rules generated from participant interviews, six rules emerged as most important to friendship: (1) standing up for the other in his/her absence; (2) share news of success with him/her; (3) show emotional support; (4) trust and confide in each other; (5) volunteer help in time of need; (6) strive to make him/her happy while in each other's company. Researchers focused more sharply on the rule construct of friendship to articulate "the *who*, *how*, and *what* of the socialization process among young adults concerning the conduct of personal relationships" [italics in original] (Baxter, Dun, & Sahistein, 2001, p. 176). Regarding the *who* aspect of communicating rules, female same-sex relationships composed 49% of all instances for communicating relational rules while male same-sex relationships accounted for 22.3% and 28% were cross-sex relationships. Moreover, friendships accounted for 70.3% of all rule-communicated occurrences (i.e. frequency of communicative episodes for relating how to behave in relationships). The *how* aspect revealed participants primarily used unsolicited advice to convey friendship rules followed by social learning observation, and solicited advice. Lastly, in answer to the *what* aspect, 67% of all rules concerned the conduct of romantic relationships while rules that applied to friendship accounted for 16.5% of all instances. Additionally, participants identified high expectations of loyalty, openness/honesty, and showing respect in both romantic relationships and friendships. Baxter et al. (2001) emphasized the salience of friendships and suggest that while individuals experience friendship firsthand, they tend

to swap information on how to conduct romantic relationships from information garnered from their friends.

Because friendships are voluntary in nature without contractual bindings and predesigned affective ties like those found in kinship, and do not adhere to superior/subordinate expectations designated in professional relationships, they produce a unique, fragile bond shaped by the interacting partners who both determine the trajectory of their unfolding friendship course. Like other relationships, however, friendships do have a beginning, middle, and end contingent on a number of variables from both in and outside of the relationship. The following section examines the literature of how individuals work to develop, maintain, and end friendships.

Friendship Development

Davis and Todd (1985) noted the desirable, universal expectations found in friendships. Among anticipatory benefits of honesty, trust, and affection, friends also expect to share rewarding experiences and provide support through difficult times. These expectations, however, transpire as the friendship progresses, “created and forged jointly by testing the likelihood that it will work (Duck, 1991, p. 29). Only through a period of development do the interacting partners recognize the potential of the relationship through the use of different strategies that support relational development. Strategies are defined as “plans, methods, or a series of maneuvers or strategies for obtaining a specific goal or result” (Dindia, 1994, p. 93). The following section first takes a closer look at some of the strategies individuals use during relationship development followed by a review of four prominent factors that promote the development of friendships.

Friendship development strategies. Bell and Daly (1984) introduced a model of affinity-seeking as a process where people “attempt to get others to like and feel positive towards them” (p. 111). They developed a typology based on participant responses from six different types of relationships including work supervisor, roommate, romantic partner, close friend, acquaintance, and neighbor. Twenty-five strategies categorized under seven different clusters emerged from participant responses that reveal what people say or do to enhance likability: 1) control and visibility (i.e. personal autonomy, reward association, assume control, dynamism, present interesting self, and physical attractiveness; 2) mutual trust (i.e. trustworthiness and openness; 3) politeness (i.e. conversational rule-keeping and concede control; 4) concern and caring (i.e. self-concept confirmation, elicit other’s disclosures, listening, supportiveness, sensitivity, and altruism; 5) other involvement (i.e. facilitate enjoyment, inclusion of other, nonverbal immediacy; 6) self involvement (i.e. self-inclusion, influence perceptions of closeness; and 7) commonalities (i.e. similarities, assuming equality, and comfortable self) (Bell & Daly, 1984; Dindia, 1994). Bell and Daly (1984) concluded that personality and contextual dynamics influenced the number of tactics used as well as their likelihood of use, and that individuals who were thought to use a number of different strategies were judged as more attractive and likable.

Baxter and Philpott (1982) studied ingratiation tactics found in developing friendships. Ingratiation strategies are the methods a person used to enhance another person’s liking of him or her and included the following six tactics: other enhancement (e.g. “I’d tell them how nice they looked that day,” p. 219); similarity (e.g. “I would walk up to them and start a conversation about something we shared at work” p. 219); self

presentation (e.g. “I would smile a lot and be nice around them so they would like me” p. 219); favor-rendering (e.g. “I’d do something nice for the person that would get back to them what I’d done” p. 219); information acquisition (e.g. “I would ask one of their friends about them to find out more” p. 219); and inclusion activity (“I’d invite them to play with me at recess” p. 210). All six of these tactics were employed across different participant age groups (age 10-31).

As these two typologies illustrate, individuals use a number of different strategies to get others to like them during relationship development. Bell and Daly’s (1984) typology of affinity-seeking tactics can be generalized to a number of different types of relationships while Baxter and Philpott’s (1992) strategies speak to how people reported pursuing and building new friendships. In a comprehensive review of friendship formation literature, Fehr (2008) identified and examined four defining factors that promote the development of friendship including environmental, situational, individual, and dyadic factors. The following summarizes some of the guiding examples of each one of these contributing factors to friendship development.

Environmental factors. These factors include those aspects of physical proximity that support or interfere with the initiation of friendship. Heavily populated cities are thought to provide more opportunity for friendships to develop as opposed smaller suburban or rural areas, however, studies revealed conflicting findings with this assumption. For example, researchers (Moser, Legendre, & Ratiu, 2003) compared the number of reported friendships from participants living in a large city and its surrounding urban area to those living in a small town. Small-town dwellers reported more friendships ($M=8.13$) than residents living in the large city ($M=7.53$) and its surrounding suburban

area ($M=6.80$). In another study, urban residents indicated more contact with their friends than those living in rural areas (Dugan & Kivett 1998) perhaps due to the availability of public transportation, but it was also found that those living in the city reported less contact with friends due to time spent on commuting to and from work every day (Moser et al., 2003).

Workplace settings also provide opportunities for friendships to develop. Men reported that 79% of their most recent ties were made at work and in their neighborhood (Fischer et al., 1977; Fischer, 1982) while women with family responsibilities reported less work-related friendship formations as they grappled with home and work responsibilities. In the classroom, researchers found that students sitting close to one another affects friendship formation. For example, students in the same class who were grouped together based on academic ability formed friendships with those in close physical proximity and who shared status similarity (Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998). In both work and school settings, Fehr (2008) noted that interaction, interdependence, and noncompetitiveness encourage friendship formation in these locations.

With the Internet, face-to-face interaction is replaced with computer-mediated communication creating another environment for relationships to form and function. Much of the research in this direction revolves around romantic relationship and qualities of friendship (e.g. trust, intimacy, and satisfaction) with little attention paid to friendship formation (Fehr, 2008). However, one study found that 80% of college undergraduates formed friendship online compared to only 6% reporting the formation of romantic relationship through the Internet (McCown, Fischer, Page, & Homant, 2001). Additionally, college students who reported less self-esteem and increased loneliness

turned to the Internet to make friends where “anonymity and lack of face-to-face communication in online interactions may decrease self-consciousness and social anxiety, which can facilitate the formation of online friendships” (Fehr, 2008, p. 34; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003).

Situational factors. Fehr (2008) identified what she calls “chance factors” (p. 35) that can help shape or hinder the formation of friendships. For example, the probability of future interaction influenced a group of female participants to judge a person more positively when they knew they would be interacting with that person in the future (Darley & Berscheid, 1967) even when that person was not evaluated as likeable as others (Tyler & Sears, 1977). Frequency of contact also contributed to friendship formation in children who were familiar with particular students from another class.

Outcome dependency was also identified as situational variables influencing friendship formation. Predicted outcome value theory (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004) posits that people seek to maximize their relational outcomes by identifying high reward potential in developing relationships while limiting low-reward relationship development. For example, in a laboratory setting students were asked to briefly visit with a same-sex classmate whom they did not know and then predict how positive the relationship would be in the future. Results showed that communication maintained with the partner over the semester, attraction, and friendship formation were all positively correlated with predicted outcome value (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004).

For friendships to develop individuals must also be available, or rather, each person must determine if there is “room in his or her life for a new friendship, given each person’s preexisting relationships and commitment” (Fehr, 2008, p. 36). Availability

refers to whether or not a person's accessibility encourages the possibility of interaction and spending time making new friends, while also assessing one's availability against their present relationships and commitments (Berg & Clark, 1986). For example, one's commitment to work and family played a role in determining how many new friendships an individual desired and whether or not these new relationships could be maintained (Gouldner & Strong, 1987).

Individual factors. Before entering into friendship, people assess the individual characteristics of relational candidates to determine whether or not they are worthy of friendship initiation. Fehr (2008) identified these assessments in terms of exclusion criteria (Rodin, 1982) and inclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria include personal characteristics that are either disliked (e.g. poor sense of humor, disrespectful behavior) or disregarded as suitable qualities for friendship (e.g. age, education level, race, physical attractiveness) (Rodin, 1982). Denrell (2005) showed that first impressions play an important role in determining friendship desirability when participants reported they were less likely to pursue future interaction with negative first impression candidates than with positive ones.

Inclusion criteria include those individual qualities desired most in people's choice of friends. While physical attractiveness contributes significantly to romantic partner selection, people also look for many of the same features in their potential friends. Research has shown that good-looking people are associated with positive relational qualities than unattractive people (van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004) and are also identified as more pleasant to interact with than those deemed physically unattractive (Zakahi & Duran, 1984).

Social skills and responsiveness also play a role in friendship formation. People with good social skills are better able to interact with others and are seen as more competent than those who do not display such abilities (Samter, 2003) especially during the formation of friendships. For example, acquainting skills, such as the ability to introduce one's self proved most important early in the friendship formation process while self-disclosure skills steered later developmental stages (Shaver, Furman, & Buhrmester, 1985; McEwan & Guerrero, 2010). Responsiveness has been operationalized as showing liking towards another (Davis & Perrowitz, 1979) or interacting with interest and concern toward another person (Berg & Archer, 1983). Participants identified responsive confederates as more likable than non-responsive confederates (Davis & Perrowitz, 1979) and responsiveness was also associated with increased self-disclosure (Berg, 1987).

Dyadic factors. Fehr (2008) identified interactional qualities that that play out between relational partners during the formative stages of friendship. A most desirable and necessary ingredient toward establishing a bond between friends revolves around the reciprocity of liking that ultimately shapes the behavior of the relational partners. Self-disclosure, conceptualized as any information communicated about one's self to another (Wheless, 1976), is paramount to reciprocal liking and, as will be discussed later, in the overall development of friendship. For example, reciprocate participants who were led to believe they were liked by their interacting partner responded with increased self-disclosure and displayed more positive behaviors than the participants believed they were not liked (Curtis & Miller, 1986). Overall, when participants perceived an increase in self-disclosure from their interaction partners, liking for the self-disclosing individual

increased and encouraged friendship formation (Clark et al., 2004). However, revealing too much information about one's self too soon may in fact scare the other relational candidate away from reciprocating self-disclosure and derail the developing friendship (Archer & Berg, 1978).

In another study, Miell and Duck (1986) identified two processes colleges students used in determining whether or not to pursue a friendship. In the first process, participants gathered information about the possible friend such as asking questions, observing the other, and responding to self-disclosure. The second process worked to shield oneself from revealing too much information too soon such as being polite, and limiting the range of topics open to discussion. Both of the processes functioned in the participants' decision to pursue the friendship (Samter 2003).

As momentum builds through the exchange of self-disclosure, dyad partners begin to identify shared commonalities that contribute to relationship development. Similarity, a major determinant in whether or not two people will become friends, accounts for much of the research regarding friendship formation (Fehr, 2008). Studies revealed a wide range of similarity factors contribute to friendship formation including (but not limited to) demographic variables (e.g. age, income, social statues) (Johnson, 1989); physical attractiveness (Cash & Derlega, 1976); attitude (Byrne, 1971); values (Davis, 1981); and leisure and activity preferences (Werner & Parmelee, 1979). Some similarity effects proved more salient than others. For example, same-sex college students reported that similar activities contributed more to their relationship development than did similar attitudes (Werner & Parmelee, 1979) while Davis (1981) suggested that shared interests help to instigate enjoyable interactions that can lead to

friendship more than shared political views. Interestingly, Curry and Kenny (1974) found no relationship between personality similarity and attraction among college students but a later study found that perceived similar personalities predicted higher friendship intensity over time (Selfhout, Denissen, Branje, & Meeus, 2009). It is also important to note that while friendship intensity and communication were highly correlated, individuals who frequently communicate are not necessarily friends. For example, frequent communication may also occur between a bully and his or her victim (Selfhout et al., 2009). Overall, we are attracted to others similar to us because “we feel more confident that we are ‘right’ in our thinking if we encounter someone else who thinks just like us” (Fehr, 2008, p. 45).

Of particular concern to the current discussion is how the various relationship formation behaviors are valued and communicated within the friendship dyad. Holstrom (2009) defined communication values as “the importance individuals place on *others’* functional communication skills” (p. 225). In this direction, Burleson and Samter (1990) developed the Communication Functions Questionnaire to assess the value participants placed on eight communication skills: comforting skill, ego support skill, conflict management skill, persuasion, informative skill (i.e. conveying of information), regulative skill (i.e. helping another fix a mistake after violating a norm), narrative skill, and conversational skill. To assess the similarity between friends’ ratings of these communication skills, responses from two dyad groups of friends (i.e. best and mutual) were compared to responses from a third dyad group (i.e. nonfriends). Overall, friends were more similar in the evaluation of conflict management skills, comforting skills, persuasive skills, and ego support skills than were nonfriends (Burleson, Samter, &

Luccetti, 1992). Additionally, highly cognitive complex individuals (i.e. people who view relationships as more abstract, possess greater communication skills, and perceive others more thoroughly) were more attracted to individuals with the same characteristics rather than those with low cognitive abilities (Burleson & Samter, 1996). Not only is it important for individuals to talk about people, problems, and issues, but “it is the capacity to talk about these matters in a similar way and on a similar level that promotes interpersonal attraction and friendship formation” (Burleson & Samter, 1996, p. 136).

As shown above, the development of friendship unfolds from a variety of environmental, situational, individual, and dyadic factors initiated by mutual attraction and driven by identified similarities. Once individuals recognize each other as friends they respond to one another through a number of communicative behaviors designed to sustain the friendship born out of each individual’s characteristics and the shared, as well as the conflicting desires and expectations placed on the relationship. The following section examines friendship maintenance and the different strategies used to continually develop and preserve the relationship.

Friendship Maintenance

Friendship is like an enterprise whose survival depends on the relational skills of its two primary investors. The marketplace of distinctive yet interdependent behaviors shapes the dyad in ways that are constantly revealing and rarely static. Just as certain behaviors characterize the development of friendship so do those behaviors that serve to maintain the relationship. Dindia and Canary (1993) suggested that relationship maintenance functions “(1) to keep a relationship in existence, (2) to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition, (3) to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition and

(4) to keep a relationship in repair” (p. 163). Moreover, relationship maintenance “involves the changing needs and goals that characterize a relationship” (Dindia, 1994; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005, p. 341). Researchers used these generally accepted conceptions of relationship maintenance to identify specific maintenance strategies individuals use to sustain ongoing friendship. This section takes a closer look at these strategies.

Maintenance strategies. Research reveals four prominent strategies have repeatedly appeared throughout the friendship literature that are used to maintain these relationships: time spent together, openness, social support, and avoidance (Dainton, Zelley, & Langan, 2003). First, friendships benefit from relational partners spending time together through shared activities and interaction like engaging in sporting activities or simply hanging out with one another (Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur, & Villagran, 2003). In maintaining adult friendships, Rawlins (1994) noted, “making the friendship a priority and scheduling opportunities to spend or share some time together was essential” (p. 290).

A second maintenance strategy, openness, refers to self-disclosure and relational talk among friends that work to maintain close, casual, and best friendships (Dainton et al., 2003). Individuals identified disclosure as the key element to intimacy in both same- and cross-sex friendships (Monsour, 1992). The breadth and depth of self-disclosure varied among friendships as conversation topics bounced between everyday talk (e.g. daily, family, work activities) and more intimate revelations (e.g. personal, relationship, and family issues) (Aries & Johnson, 1983). Talk as a mere occurrence in the relationship “not only satisfies the partners that the relationship exists and is important *irrespective of*

the content of talk [italics original], it also reifies, sustains, and produces the relationship (Duck, 1994, p. 51; Duck & Pond, 1989).

Third, social support strategies contribute to an *other-oriented* perspective to maintaining a friendship. Supportive communication refers to messages designed to show emotional support (e.g. acceptance, comfort, concern), and inform (e.g. advice, problem solving) (Bachman & Bippus, 2005). College students reported that affectively oriented communication skills such as ego support, comforting, and conflict management, are more important than nonaffectively (i.e. instrumental) oriented skills such as persuasion, narrative ability (e.g. storytelling, joke telling), and referential skills (e.g. expressing, explaining) (Burleson & Samter, 1990). Anticipating stressful situations also reveals comforting maintenance behaviors (Winstead, Derlega, Lewis, Sanchez-Huckles, & Clarke, 1992). Students preparing to deliver a speech in front of an audience reported more confidence and less depression interacting with an opposite-sex friend than when interacting with a stranger. No significant difference was found between same-sex friends and strangers (Winstead et al., 1992).

Ramirez's (2007) exploration of decision-making style in friendship supported an other-centered perspective toward relational satisfaction (RS), meaning those participative styles of friendships that foster trust and mutuality lead to greater overall communication quality (OCQ). Ramirez noted the obvious connection between RS and increased OCQ but suggested that perhaps poor OCQ may influence friendship termination. Associated with relational satisfaction, Agne and White (2004) explored how face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987) influenced support satisfaction during the discussion of problems between friends. They found that support providers were more

satisfied when seekers directly stated their need for support or advice and satisfaction increased when support seekers recognized the provider's skills and expressed their appreciation to the provider.

Finally, avoidance strategies help to sustain friendships by steering clear of sensitive conversation topics as friends negotiate the different topics they are willing (or unwilling) to discuss. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) found that 97% of respondents indicated an avoidance of discussing at least one topic with their cross-sex friend or dating partner. Clark and Delia (1997) found that under certain distressful situations (e.g. low test score, unemployment, accident involving sibling) the majority of participants indicated they would prefer their friend not mention the distressing event. Furthermore, 60% of respondents preferred the friend to cautiously broach the topic allowing the troubled individual the opportunity to decide whether or not to discuss the issue. Contrary to the popular belief that women disclose more than men, Afifi and Guerrero (1998) found "that the sexes do not differ in the degree to which they consciously avoid disclosure" (p. 242). They suggested that males purposely choose to avoid disclosure more than females and that individuals avoid certain topics with males because they perceive males "would be unable or unwilling to offer support" (p. 243).

Other strategies and behaviors found throughout the literature also contribute to friendship maintenance. For example, Rose and Serafica (1986) identified four maintenance categories within different levels of friendship as proximity, affection, interaction, and self-maintained. Specifically, they asked individuals to consider hypothetical and actual maintenance behaviors as they related to close, casual, and best friend relationships. Respondents indicated that at both the hypothetical and actual

friendship levels, interaction (i.e. quality and quantity of interaction) and affection (i.e. compassion, love) were most important while proximity (i.e. running into a friend) was most needed at the hypothetical and actual levels.

In a similar direction, Oswald, Clark, and Kelly (2004) developed a friendship maintenance scale from participant responses and found that positivity (i.e. rewarding and enjoyable behaviors), supportiveness, openness, and interaction all predicted relational satisfaction while supportiveness and interaction led to relational commitment. The scale also revealed that individuals are reciprocal in their maintenance behaviors and show agreement between self and others reported maintenance behavior indicating that friends match each other in type and frequency of maintenance behavior with little variance between casual, close, and best friends. Interestingly, strategies for family and romantic partners are reported as more important than strategies for friendship because individuals place more concern on maintaining their family and romantic relationships than they do their friendships (Canary et al., 1993).

Bochner (1984) articulated a functional approach to interpersonal communication suggesting that relationships not only function in particular ways for people, but that individuals come to expect relationships to function in particular ways for them. Within the functional perspective lies the social skills approach proposing that the type of relationship determines the use of particular communication skills. For example, across different friendship levels (i.e. acquaintance, casual, best) best friends rated conflict management, ego support, comforting, and regulative skills (i.e. helping someone overcome a mistake after violating a norm) as more important than did casual friends or acquaintances (Westmyer & Meyers, 1996). In terms of same-sex and cross-sex

friendships, affective skills were rated as more important than instrumental skills (Holstrom, 2009). Specifically, women identified affective-oriented skills as more important for female friends than for male friends. Males rated affective-oriented skills as more important for their female friends than their male friends while women recognized instrumentality oriented skills as more important for their male friends than their female friends (Holstrom, 2009). Similarly, Baumgarte and Nelson (2009) found that individuals' preferences for same- or cross-sex friendships were due in large part to the values they assigned to these different types of friendships.

As with same-sex friendships, cross-sex friendships produce an array of tensions between relational partners. Guerrero and Chavez (2005) explored these communicative responses as a function of relational maintenance. They found particular maintenance behaviors (e.g. flirtation, antisocial behavior, social networking) to be salient in cross-sex friendships and identified two emergent categories as relationship talk, which refers to discussing feelings about the relationship, and talk about relationships other than the friendship. Those individuals who perceived mutual romantic possibilities in their cross-sex friendship reported more relational maintenance than other types of relational intent (i.e. desires romance, rejects romance, strictly platonic). Zhang and Merolla (2006) found that individuals who expressed dislike for their friend's romantic partner were primarily concerned for their friend's well being and felt an obligation to express their apprehension. Some of the reasons cited for expressing dislike of their friend's partner centered on negative personality characteristics, possessive behavior, and disapproving of their lifestyle. Forty-two percent of the participants reported that disclosure of dislike had no impact while 32% considered their friend's disclosure and ultimately broke off the

relationship (Zhang & Merolla, 2006).

Samter and Cupach (1998) explored types of topics in same- and cross-sex friendships that bring about conflict among young adults. Surprisingly, respondents most frequently indicated an absence of conflict and instead cited conflict as *disagreement*. However, one-third of all conflict fell into one of three categories: Disapproval about Relationship Choices, Friendship Rule Violation, and Public Transgressions. Both men and women reported conflicts over Sharing Activities (men more than women) and Sharing Space/Possessions (women more than men) (Samter & Cupach, 1998).

Friendship Deterioration

Friendships sometimes veer off course and deteriorate through changes “at an individual level (e.g. death, change in marital status), environmental level (e.g. moving to separate cities, changing jobs) or dyadic level (e.g. change in reward-cost ration of the friendship)” (Hays, 1988, p. 404). Like the initiation strategies found in developing friendships, individuals communicate their desire to disengage from the relationship in different ways. This section first takes a closer look at some of the strategies individuals used during relationship disengagement followed by a review of the contributing factors in relationship deterioration as they apply to friendships.

Friendship deterioration strategies. While the majority of typologies of relationship termination strategies found in the literature speak to romantic relationships, Baxter and Philpott (1982) identified six disengagement tactics found in deteriorating friendships: other negation (e.g. “I’d tell him that I really didn’t like him anymore” p. 220); difference (e.g. “I’d tell her that it really wasn’t working out because we were so different” p. 220); self-presentation (e.g. I would make new friends that I knew she

couldn't stand" p. 220); cost-rendering (e.g. "I would gradually stop doing things for him as favors" p. 220); disinterest (e.g. "I wouldn't ask how it's going or anything when we met" p. 220); and exclusion (e.g. "I would invite their best friend to do something with me instead of them" p. 220). Overall, this study revealed that individuals used exclusion and other negation to end the friendship.

Friendships also deteriorate in other ways. Respondents reported the breaking of the previously discussed friendship rules (Argyle & Henderson, 1984) leads to friendship deterioration. Specifically, the rule violations most identified as contributing to the breakdown of friendships included jealousy/criticism; lack of tolerance for third party relationships; disclosing confidences; not volunteering to help when needed; nagging or criticizing the other person publicly; and not showing trusting, confiding, positive regard or emotional support (Argyle & Henderson, 1984). Rose (1984) found that physical separation most frequently precipitated friendship deterioration and/or termination in young adult relationships, followed by dislike for the other. Individuals described the ending of their best friendships as a process, even calling it a "slow death" (Rose & Serafica, 1986, p. 285).

Changes in one's social network also played a role in the breakdown of friendships. For example, men (71%) and women (65%) reported and downturn in one or more of their friendships after engaging in a new romantic relationship (Bendtschneider & Duck, 1993). Not surprisingly, marriage and parenthood also affected friendship bonds as these relationship events took precedence over maintaining friendship ties. In a study (Oswald & Clark, 2004) of high school best friendships transitioning to college, results showed that half of high school best friends became close or casual friends after the first

year of college due to the formation of new friendships as “letting go of particular friendships is a necessary and potentially growth-enhancing aspect of the individual’s own developmental process (Hays, 1988, p. 405).

To summarize, the development, maintenance, and deterioration of friendship produce an array of communication strategies relational partners use over the lifespan of the friendship. Friendships development revolves around reciprocal liking and the identification of shared similarities, while maintaining friendships is dependent on reciprocal openness, shared emotional support, and the amount of time friends spend together. Friendships fall apart when distance becomes a factor or when other relationships take precedence over the current friendship.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Friendship

Researchers have used a number of theoretical models in their approach to studying how communication shapes and defines friendship. The following section examines *stage* and *exchange* models as they relate directly to friendship formation, maintenance, and termination. A third area couples together a discussion of *dialogism* and *relational dialects* that together serve as the guiding theoretical foundation for this interpersonal study of friendship reconnection.

Stage Models

Stage models represent a linear view of relationship development and deterioration moving in a straight-line, smooth fashion from less intimacy to more intimacy through increased self-disclosure, while a decrease in disclosure and communication leads to relationship deterioration. The application of these models in communication research has focused primarily on romantic relationships with little

attention paid to friendships. However, their inclusion here allows comparison to a non-linear or cyclical view (i.e. dialectical theory) of relationship development and deterioration to follow later in this chapter. First, a brief overview of Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory lays the foundation for competing theoretical insights.

Resting on a foundation of self-disclosure, Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) articulates relationship development on two dimensions: *breadth* and *depth*. Breadth refers to the number of topics available to another person as well as the amount of interaction related to these topic areas. Depth refers to the level of intimacy exchange where superficial information (i.e. biographical information) about an individual exists on the outer layers of a perceived onion-skin personality structure. Four stages of development are defined through breadth and depth. The first stage, *orientation*, refers to the initial interactions at the most superficial, outer levels. The second stage, *exploratory affective exchange*, signals mutual disclosure between the two individuals on a wider range of topics through periphery and intermediate levels. At the third stage, *affective exchange*, communication is open at the periphery levels with increased disclosure at the intermediate and central levels. The fourth, *stable exchange*, allows for communication all levels (i.e. surface, periphery, intermediate, and central).

Relationships progress in a linear fashion as individuals weigh the costs and rewards of interacting with each other and decide whether or not to pursue the relationship based on the perceived benefits of future interactions. Relationship development occurs as the quantity and quality of disclosure increases, moving from the outer, superficial layers of an individual's personality toward the central layers where deeper more meaningful personality properties reside (i.e. fears, values, beliefs). Moreover, relationships are

assumed to de-escalate by reversing in the opposite direction of the developmental stages (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Hays (1985) used Social Penetration Theory as a framework for his longitudinal study of friendship development in first-term college students. Specifically, he hypothesized that participant interactions would increase from superficial to intimate exchange, and that breadth and depth of interaction, would correlate positively to participants' ratings of friendship intimacy. In line with Social Penetration Theory, the first three weeks of interactions comprised of superficial interaction (e.g. watching television, catching up on local news events) progressing to more intimate levels of behavior (e.g. discussing personal problems). In later stages (i.e. 3-6 weeks), the quantity of interactions accounted for increased percentage of the variance and, as expected, the level of friendship intimacy increased as the relationship progressed.

Exchange Models

Social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) posits that social behavior involves a series of communicative exchanges of resources based on the costs and rewards of interaction. Resources generate rewards when they produce pleasure and are perceived as costs when they produce tension, embarrassment, pain, or physical and mental endeavors (Stafford, 2008). Often, self-interests drive our motivation to increase our rewards at the costs of others while at other times we interact in more cooperative ways to maximize the rewards for both parties. Responding cooperatively indicates an increased level of interdependence where the potential for rewards is contingent on the behavior of both individuals. In short, exchange theory suggests that our communicative actions are based on the potential for costs and the desire for rewards.

In the previously described study by Hays (1985), college students identified several costs in their development of friendships including: time expenditure, added responsibilities, emotional aggravation, loss of independence, negative influence of friend on self, and negative effects of friendship on other relationships. Shafer-Hand and Furman (2009) identified cost and reward differences in other-sex adolescent friendships as compared to romantic relationships. Perspective taking and learning about the other sex was seen as a reward in same-sex friendships while less interdependence characterized these relationships. Additionally, physical attraction was also identified as a reward of other-sex friendships as well as of romantic relationships. Lack of intimacy, jealousy, and confusion about the nature of cross-sex were identified as costs in other-sex relationships compared to romantic relationships. Overall, other-sex friendships revealed less interdependency and were seen as less supportive than other peer relationships (Shafer-Hand & Furman, 2009).

Similarly, Wright (1978) outlined a theory of friendship based on the conception of self in a dyadic relationship. Using an analogy of economic investment and return, Wright suggested that individuals make an investment of self in the form of time, commitment, and overall increased relatedness and involvement with the other person. As a return on this investment of self, the individual experiences “an enhanced sense of individuality, facilitated self-affirmation, facilitated self-evaluation, facilitated self-growth” (Wright, 1978, p. 199). This investment-of-self concept underpins Wright’s definition of friendship that emphasizes 1) voluntary interaction, and 2) personal focus. First, the voluntary aspect implies that friends make time for one another, even at the cost of their own inconvenience. As voluntary interdependence increases so does the strength

of the friendship. Second, personal focus refers to a “person-qua-person” response to relating where friends react to the distinctiveness, sincerity, “and irreplaceability in the relationship” (Wright, 1978, p. 199). Mutual attachments increase in the dyadic relationship as both individuals trade investments of self that serve to enhance their respective self-identity and strengthen the bond of friendship.

Equity theory (Deutsch, 1985) is based on the principle of distributive justice suggesting that individuals who provide the most inputs into the relationship should reap the most rewards. Equitable relationships exist when the ratio of outcomes to inputs is the same for both partners. Inequity occurs when one person has a greater outcome/input ratio than their relational partner (i.e. overbenefited), or when a person experiences a lower outcome/input ratio than the other (i.e. underbenefited). Overbenefited individuals experience guilt and are less content in the relationship while underbenefited individuals feel the least satisfied in the relationship because they do not reap same amount of rewards as their partner. In these instances when individuals experience inequity the relational partners take steps to restore equitable input/outcomes ratios (Canary & Zelley, 2000; Hatfield, Traupmann, Spreecher, Utne, & Hay, 1985).

Due to the fragile and voluntary nature of friendship, equity often works as a maintenance strategy. For example, as a motive to keep opposite-sex friendship platonic and equitable, individuals engaged in proactive maintenance behaviors (i.e. openness, share activities, positivity, and support) to safeguard the friendship (Messman, Canary, & Hause, (2000). However, perceived lack of rewards and overbenefitedness produced avoidance in some opposite-sex friend due to uncertainty about the other’s feelings

toward them, or when a friend's social network would disapprove of their romantic desire with their opposite-sex friend.

In a study (Roberto & Scott, 1986) of equity in older adult friendships (i.e. ages 64-91), equity was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, perhaps due to participants' definition of friendship. Between best friends, satisfaction may be high due to the nature of a best friendship where exchanges are not viewed as motivating factors but as pleasurable benefits exchanged between friends (Roberto & Scott, 1986).

Over/underbenefitedness may occur in best friendship but these issues may be viewed as less of a concern due to the overall satisfaction a best friendship provides. In less intimate friendships (i.e. acquaintances, good friend), equitable exchanges might be the basis for the entire relationship that lead to less satisfaction in the face overbenefitedness or underbenefitedness (Roberto & Scott, 1986).

Dialectical/Dialogic Theory

At its core, dialectics reveals life in contradiction: "a unity of opposites, that is, at least two phenomena that are united at the same time that they are opposites" (Baxter & West, 2003, p. 494). Much of the current dialectical literature finds root in the philosophical mediations of Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Hegel asserted that our perception of phenomena revolved around the principle of "Nothing," that *what is* reflected *what is not*, and that "everything is in a continual state of flux or transition to a new form that results from the interplay of a phenomenon and its opposite" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 21). Central to this "process of motion" (p. 21) is the realization of "Becoming" as opposed to a more static and fixed state of "Being." Hegel's philosophy emphasized that the process of "Becoming" ultimately leads us to higher

consciousness “to know God’s plan of the universe” (p. 22). Consciousness, then, centralized Hegel’s view toward the mind of the individual, rather than to the social experience while the interaction between *nothing* and *being* produced contradiction necessary to the process of *becoming* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Marx, however, argued against Hegel’s view and believed that consciousness allowed humans to make sense of their oppressed, class-defined existence, and to “construct new material conditions that liberated them from oppression” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 23). Contradiction and change resulted from society’s materialistic endeavors, and consciousness rose from a social, rather than an individual, experience. In this way, Marx introduced the notion of praxis, whereby people who are aware of their materialistic oppression could do something to alter those oppressive conditions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

While Bakhtin agreed with Marx’s view of consciousness embedded in the social process, he did not limit this concept to economic manifestations of a materialistic society. Marx believed that consciousness “was grounded in [individuals’] daily, class defined existence and not in the realm of ideas that were somehow independent of the material world” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 22). Bakhtin extended Marx’s perspective of social reality to include a consciousness of self and others that comprised all aspects of the human communication experience, (i.e. all social life). Specifically, Bakhtin viewed social life as an “ongoing contradictory flux between centripetal (i.e. forces of unity) and centrifugal (i.e. forces of difference) forces” (Baxter, 2004, p. 184). Centripetal voices represent worldviews from dominant, finalized closed system of meanings while centrifugal voices express less dominant, marginalized opens systems of

meanings (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009). Self is constructed through the push and pull of autonomy and connection; the need to separate from others (i.e. centrifugal) and the need to connect to others (i.e. centripetal) (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Thus, Bakhtin's focused on dialogue that referenced the ongoing struggle between the push and pull of competing discourses (i.e. systems of meanings) revealing a unity of individual perspectives through conversation, a multivocal exchange of at least two distinct and unique voices where "meaning making is a profoundly unfinalizable process" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009, p. 30).

Bakhtin referred to a speaker's words as a particular *utterance* in a chain comprised of links of utterance. He described utterance as social talk existing "at the boundary between consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 106) where the dialogue happening within us about conversations from the distant past shape our consciousness and therefore construct our interactions in the present. He saw utterance as a link in a chain of dialogue connecting past conversations, either distal or proximal, to the immediate unfolding dialogue and identified four sites where competing discourses are found (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter 2011). First, the *dialogue of the distant already-spoken with expressed utterance of the present* applied words and expressions from the distant past to the current conversation. For example, an embrace between two friends might be predicated on the basis of a past, mutually expressed utterance of "You are my best friend." *Dialogue of the immediately prior utterances with the present utterance* signified recent expressions in reference to the current conversation. Saying to someone, "I know what you mean" can only be read as an agreement between two people when it is linked to another person's immediate prior utterance of, "There's nothing

better than jumping in a pool on a hot summer day.” Third, the *dialogue of the present utterance with the anticipated response of the listener* referred to the construction the speaker’s utterance based on the possible response from listener. Declaring to someone, “You’re my best friend” for the first time might elicit a different response than when expressed in later conversations anticipating a matter-of-fact acknowledgement. Finally, the *dialogue of the present utterance with the anticipated response of the generalized other* (who Bakhtin referred to as the superaddressee) represented the “expectations that lies beyond the immediate situation” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 28). For example, in thinking about declaring someone as a particular type of friend (e.g. casual, close, or best), one may question the appropriateness of such a statement within the broader societal context of friendship. A speaker’s utterance, then, is always part of a larger utterance chain where competing discourse intertwine to shape a number of possible meaning outcomes. Holquist (2002) coined the term *dialogism* to represent Bakhtin’s work as a theory of meaning making through the language of competing discourses.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) extended Bakhtin’s dialogical pursuits to the area relationship communication that provided foundation for their theory of relational dialects, stating: “Our alternative assumption is that relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in interaction” (p. 6). Like dialogism, this notion of the ‘interplay of opposing tendencies’ stood opposite from that of a monologic perspective that represented an *individual* way of knowing, neglecting the other as “merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). This was also different from a dualistic perspective that took into account the opposing forces of a particular phenomenon, but

separated them as *two distinct and static events*. A dualistic view of a particular communication episode invokes *either* a preference for one polarity over another *or* the enactment of each of the opposing forces simultaneously. The “either/or” nature of dualism suggests that opposites act in parallel to one another (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Contrary to the “either/or” concept of dualism, Baxter and Montgomery focused on the “both/and” quality of relating, as revealed in a participant interview about a three-month relationship: “Every relationship is a meeting of two people and however hard you try, you’re not gonna form one sort of unified whole; you need the unity but there also has to be individuality for a relationship to be really close” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 5). *Both* unity *and* individuality, articulated as the dialectic of autonomy-connection, represented but one contradiction. Other dialectical positions frequently identified by dialectical scholars include integration-separation, inclusion-seclusion, stability-change, predictability-novelty, conventionality-uniqueness, expression-privacy, openness-closedness, and revelation-concealment. Dialectics is not representational of a single theory but rather “. . . a family of theories organized around certain shared assumptions or principles” (Baxter, Braithwaite, Golish, & Olson, 2002, p. 6). These principles revolve around the concepts of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality.

Contradiction. Contradiction focuses on the interplay between the unity of opposites. Opposition signifies both a positive and negative connotation. Positive opposition assumes two distinct objects cancel each other out (i.e. X and Y) while negative opposition identifies both the presence and absence of an object (i.e. X and not X) (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Israel (1979) identified nuances of contradictions in oppositions such as mutually exclusive and exhaustive opposites (e.g. life and death),

mutually exclusive but not exhaustive contradictory opposites (e.g. independence and dependence) and complimentary oppositions (e.g. giving and receiving). Rawlins (1989) noted the contradictory propensities of social life allow for the building of explanation rather than formal, logical rationalization and in doing so allows for certain possibilities. First, one can examine the contradictions found in particular social entities that reside both “within the entity and those occurring between the particular formation and external units contextualizing it” (Rawlins, 1989, p. 161). For example, two friends work to manage internal tensions, such as expressive and protective communication, while external contradictions related to one’s job or marriage may also impinge on the relationship. Second, the tensions of synchrony and asynchrony reveal contradictions over time such as when friends develop ideas and beliefs at different rates that may expose contradictions in the relationship. Third, certain contradictions might hold greater significance than others at different times in a relationship, or one prevailing aspect of a contradiction (e.g. autonomy) may outweigh another (e.g. connection) so that it more completely typifies the interaction between friends than the dialectic entire (autonomy-connection) (Rawlins, 1989).

Change. Montgomery and Baxter (1998) referred to dialectical change as “. . . a difference in some phenomenon over time” (p. 7) and envision change as a spiraling event, both directional and cyclical. In contrast to some scholars who view change as teleological, that is, having directional goal or end state, Montgomery and Baxter referred to relational change as *dialectical complexity* where change is multidirectional and ongoing. Rawlins (1989) noted the presence of both stability and change found in contradiction, stating “One must examine various levels of the interconnection and

mutual antagonism of opposites to understand how a social formation is simultaneously composing and changing itself” (p. 161).

Praxis. The dialectical principle of praxis represented the human experience as both subject and object where “Individuals both act and are acted on” (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998, p. 9). Here, prior human action facilitates and inhibits action of the present that influences human action in the future. In terms of friendship, certain objective constraints affect the decision friends make in particular social situations. For example, one must decide whether or not to publicly or privately acknowledge a friend who is not looked upon favorably by one’s spouse or other friends. The spouse and other friends are products of choice made by the individuals and therefore work into the decision of acknowledgement that will inevitably change affect future interactions with the friend in question (Rawlins, 1989).

Totality. The notion of totality does not suggest “completeness” in relation to a phenomenon, but rather that “a phenomenon can be understood only in relation to other phenomenon” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 14). The phenomenon, or the contradiction, becomes the unit of analysis and with this notion of totality comes three issues: location of contradiction, contradiction interdependencies, and the interplay of contradictions in context. The location of contradiction resides between relational parties, though not always in equal parts. For example, one person may desire more interdependence while another seeks autonomy. The interdependencies of contradiction are what Conforth (1968) described as the “knot of contradictions” (p. 111) that “coexist and change in relation to one another over time” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 14). Additionally, totality requires that researcher study contradiction *in situ*, that is, where it

occurs. Rawlins (1989) stated, “I conceive any component or aspect of friendship as existing in connection with all others” (p. 159). He suggests the social activities performed between friends (e.g. judgment and acceptance, candor and restraint) are affected by each of their separate, personal circumstances that are shaped by and continue to shape other contexts. Therefore, a friend’s desire to show public affection may contradict the other’s need for restraint. As a consequence, the friends must renegotiate their practice of public affection that simultaneously creates new conversations within the friendship (Rawlins, 1989).

In contrast to the linear model of relationship development (e.g. Social Penetration Theory), Baxter (1988) offered a dialectical approach to the study of relationship development. Baxter suggested four phases of autonomy-connection mark the initial exploration of the relationship, followed by more detailed articulation of individuals’ interdependency and dependency expectations, a synthesis of autonomy and connection, and finally a movement from connection to autonomy (dissolution). The dialectic of novelty-predictability appears in the first phase, for example, where predictive behavior is marked “through the enactment of initial interaction scripts, i.e. highly structured interaction routines characterized by stock topics and actions” (Baxter, 1988, p. 23; Douglas, 1984). Novelty works as individuals acquire new information in exploration of the other individual. Too much questioning on the part of one individual might be perceived as straying too far from the prescribed interaction scripts by the other, creating tension between the interactants. The contradiction of openness-closedness operates in much the same way as “relationship parties engage in superficial self-disclosure activity, thereby demonstrating the willingness to be open without

jeopardizing the safety of closedness about self” (Baxter, 1988, p. 264). The process of moving back and forth between different, yet interrelated, poles reaffirms Baxter’s (1988) position that (a) the study of contradictions should be conceived as not static but as a process and (b) this process should move beyond the articulations of phase and stage developmental models to examine these stages as points of contradictions and change.

To this end, studies have applied a dialectical lens to turning point analysis examining the process of relationship progression and termination (Johnson et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2004). Defined as “any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a relationship” (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 470), turning point analysis provides examination of the process where “positive or negative adjustments in relationships occur” (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 231; Baxter and Bullis, 1986). This process revealed different dialectical tensions at different points of relational progression. Johnson et al. (2003) asked participants to plot on a graph the different points of relational closeness over time determined by specific turning points in their friendships. Results revealed over half of the friendships moved in a pattern from development to deterioration to development supporting a dialectical perspective for articulating relationship progression. However, 40% of respondents indicated no downturn in progression thus demonstrating a sequential view of development for some friendships. Participants also indicated reasons other than conflict (e.g. sharing of activities) led to friendship closeness. Moreover, turning points involving self-disclosure received little mention (2%) in relation to closeness. The most commonly reported turning points in friendship dissolution were identified as less affection, friend or self changed, stopped participating in activities or spending time together, and increase in distance (Johnson et al., 2004). Also, traditional

linear views accounted for the majority of trajectories toward relationship deterioration (Johnson et al., 2004).

In addition to some of the more universally identified dialectical positions (e.g. autonomy-connection, integration-separation, inclusion-seclusion, stability-change) Rawlins (1992) identified several dialectical principles located specifically in friendships distinguishing between the groupings of contextual and interactional dialectics. *Contextual dialects* reside in the interaction between friends influenced by the social order of American culture. These dialectical positions include the dialectic of the private and the public, and the dialectic of the ideal and the real. *Interactional dialectics* reveal the tensions associated between the benevolent and malevolent expressive practices of friendship that involves “a constant interaction between interpretive and behavioral practices to maintain a mutual definition of the relationship as friendship” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 15). Included in this cluster are the dialectic of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent, the dialectic of affection and instrumentality, the dialectic of judgment and acceptance, and the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness. The following section briefly reviews each of these contextual and interactional dialectical principles separately.

The dialectic of the private and the public. As previously discussed, friendship lacks legal, binding acknowledgment scripted for the public domain. Instead, the participants within the dyad, transcending publicly defined formalities dictated by social directives, constitute its provisional features. As Paine (1969) suggested, friendship is a “institutionalized non-institution” (p. 514). Rawlins (1992) articulates this dialectic by suggesting that friendship operates as a ‘double agency’ in the larger social order, moving

between public marginality and private morality. What the public may view as behavior maintaining the status quo, friends may find as impinging on their freedoms. At one moment a friend within the dyad might be praised for recognizing a public or private aspect of the relationship and later be condemned or applauded publicly for the same action. The dialectic is continually negotiated through the communication of friendship.

The dialectic of the ideal and the real. Rawlins (1992) suggested that friendship does share certain recognizable attributes that are ideal and real: friendship is voluntary; friendship is a personal relationship; a spirit of equality pervades friendship; mutual involvement characterizes friendship; and friendship implies affective ties. These ideas of friendship are made possible, depending on the current social situation. In other words, the idyllic nature of friendship does not always match the reality found within the relationship. The term “friend” can be used to describe someone who has done something good, or removed to emphasize social distance. As a dialectical conception, individuals constantly struggle to meet the ideal of friendship while responding to the exigencies of the real relationship.

The dialectic of affection and instrumentality. There is no doubting the affective ties that friendship affords, just as there are instrumental benefits that a friend provides for the other. For example a friend might express affection of the other in a given situation only as an effort toward eliciting the same response to meet self-esteem needs. Within friendship, individuals might voluntarily offer support in times of crises, or might feel obliged to. As a result, individuals distinguish between casual, close, and best friends signaling a preference of one over another. The communication that emerges between the

affective and instrumental ties of friendship is an ongoing and continually negotiated dialectical tension within the relationship.

The dialectic of judgment and acceptance. A prominent feature of friendship is the freedom to express thoughts and feelings to another within the safe confines of the relationship. People feel liked and accepted despite their annoying qualities that might divide other relationships. However, friendship is not void of judgment as individuals construct honest responses in reaction to particular revelations. On one hand, these responses are critical in design but they also imply that a friend is worthy enough to judge. As a dialectic, judgment and acceptance are moments of expression that must be carefully managed and articulated within the friendship.

The dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness. As previously discussed, much of the process of developing and maintaining friendships revolves around self disclosure and the interactions that result from revealing one's self to other. The notion to reveal or conceal is an ongoing dialectic found in friendships, as Rawlins (1992) suggested: "self limits self's own vulnerability and strives to protect other's sensitivities while still expressing thoughts and feelings" (p .22). This provides yet another dialectical tension that friends struggle to maintain and manage in ongoing relationships.

In sum, the above review demonstrates the application of three theoretical models (i.e. stage, exchange, & dialectical) to the study of friendship formation, maintenance, and deterioration. In essence, these models offer a way of examining the life course of friendship and the issues these relational partners face at the intersection of voluntary commitment and interdependent expectations. More space was purposely devoted to dialogic/dialectical considerations to lay the foundation for examining both the individual

and shared experience of friends re-relating after an extended period of disconnect. Relational matters become complicated when distance, whether it is proximal, psychological, or emotional, enters into the relationship (Sahlestein, 2006). Personal relationships are more likely to succeed when closeness prevails through intimacy and emotional support but often crumble under the weight of distance and separation (Baxter & Montgomery 1996). Friendships that must deal with distance and separation do so according to how each relational partner negotiates the continuity of the relationship. The following section examines Sigman's (1991) theory of continuity and its role in sustaining, rather than maintaining, relationships. Continuity adds yet another theoretical thread in experiential fabric of refriending.

Relationship Continuity

This study examines the phenomenon of friends reestablishing their relationship with one another after an extended period (i.e. years) of little to no communication. Conceptualizing this phenomenon assumes that a period of communication dormancy opened a relational crevasse between friends at some point during the relationship. As discussed above, friendships may deteriorate due to a number of influences outside of the relationship (e.g. moving away, increased responsibilities, new relationships) that disrupt the social patterning of the friendship. Over time, friends lose touch with one another as each responds to the demands and responsibilities of their present social lives. What, then, becomes of a relationship when ongoing interaction becomes increasingly intermittent or ceases over time?

To answer this question we must first consider how individuals negotiate the “ongoingness” of relational life, more specifically conceptualized as *continuity*. In his

articulation of continuity, Sigman (1991, 1995) first distinguished between three rule-governed behavioral domains of human communication: the interactional, the social, and the semiotic. “The interactional order provides a structure for face-to-face discourse; the social order for the social division of labor and responsibility [and associated identity formation]; and the semiotic order, the grammar of particular channels of communication” (Sigman, 1987 p. 61). Within the interactional order, face-to-face communication produces conversational moments that define the continuity of a particular relationship. Here, talk determines for each co-member the momentary behaviors and expectations of what Sigman (1995) referred to as an *interactional relationship* (e.g. speaker-hearer, lecturer-audience). For example, our greeting and leave-taking behaviors are made apparent through the language we use to enact these particular behaviors at particular times. We use talk in certain interactive moments to achieve particular outcomes (e.g. conversing with a store at the checkout counter); however this is not necessarily the same talk that sustains or transforms relationships.

In contrast, the social order positions *social relationships* as continuous “*outside of and apart from* any particular interactional event” [italics in original] (Sigman, 1991, p. 108). Sigman (1991) argued that *relationship continuity constructional units* define a social relationship as continuous in the absence of face-to-face interaction. These constructional units are broken down into three categories: prospective, introspective, and retrospective behavioral units. *Prospective units* represent those behaviors that “precede physical separation on the part of the relationship co-members” (Sigman, 1991, p. 112). Simply saying, “See you next time” before parting company with another produces relationship continuity by suggesting an anticipated, future interaction. Saying goodbye

in this manner also concludes a *co-present* social encounter while initiating a *non-co-present* one without terminating the social relationship and simultaneously acknowledges the worthiness of the co-members. *Introspective units* of behavior occur during periods of physical separation and interactive dormancy that work to remind relationship co-members of their continuing obligations to one another and also signals these obligations to others. Decorating one's dorm room wall with pictures of friends, or wearing an engagement ring are examples of introspective behaviors signaling the ongoing obligation and affiliation to a particular social relationship during periods of non co-presence. Finally, relational co-members construct *retrospective behavioral units* when reencountering one another following an interactional hiatus. These behaviors retrospectively mark the existence of a previous and ongoing relationship shared by the co-members. For example, two friends meeting over lunch reminiscing about a party they both attended the previous weekend reenacts the relationship through small talk and works not only in reifying the relationship for the relational co-members but also "bridge[s] the hiatus between the previously shared interaction experience and the current one" (Sigman, 1991, p. 120). Moreover, these two friends who are catching up after years of not interacting with one other may recall the same party and thereby reconstruct the continuity of their relationship. In this way, shared past experiences, as well as new information about the period of interactional hiatus, work to construct future interactions:

"the unit that is retrospective (in that it refers to information 'in the past') also has a prospective quality to it (in that it projects the likelihood of future interaction and the need to know what information can be taken as 'given' for that

subsequent interaction); catching up thus functions as a powerful continuity constructor by converging the past with the future.” (Sigman, 1991, p. 121)

So while individuals construct continuity at both the micro-level of momentary interaction and at the macro-level of historically shared social experience, other relationships define their connection as *repeatable* and *restorable* (Schutz & Luckman, 1973). For example, a husband and wife relationship produces continuity through the institutionally recognized bond of marriage and the responsibilities that accompany these roles maintained even during times of non co-presence. In contrast, the interaction between a barber and a customer typically produces a repeatable and restorable relationship through the obligations defined primarily from their recurring co-present relationship. Sigman (1991) argued that relational co-members treat their relationship as continuous based on the socio-cultural constraints surrounding the relationship that define the emotional attachments between the co-members. A repeatable/restorable relationship relies less on constructing continuity behavioral units and instead depends more on the retrievable interactional behaviors to maintain episodes of interaction “as we tend to understand courses of acts as unities with larger (and more lasting) meaning-contexts . . . in the plans and interpretations of the persons concerned” (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 71; Sigman, 1991).

Sigman’s (1991) concept of continuity sheds light on how relational partners sustain the “ongoingness” of relational life during moments of co-presence and non co-presence. Some scholars, particularly those supporting a dialectical perspective in their examination of interpersonal phenomena, take issue with using *maintenance* as a metaphor for describing the strategies individuals use to manage a relationships and

instead prefer to view such efforts as *sustaining* a relationship. As reviewed above, maintenance refers to those actions individuals use to keep a relationship in its present state, or to fix something that has gone wrong in the relationship in order to return it to a stable condition (Dindia & Canary, 1993). From a dialectical point of view, stability is only one aspect of a relationship that is constantly changing thus producing a dialectical tension of stability vs change. While relationships may oscillate between periods of more stability and periods of more change, the tension between these two poles remains constant. Maintenance, then, refers to those actions that privilege one pole (i.e. stability) over another (i.e. change) in order to keep patterns of interaction consistent in the relationship. Consistency leads to relationship disintegration when partners resist change in favor of keeping relational matters on an even keel. Sustaining a relationship suggests that relational partners are constantly adjusting to changes in order to support the continuity of the relationship (Fisher 1987; Montgomery, 1993).

From a revealing study of adult friendships, Rawlins (1994) discusses the challenges of sustaining friendships over time. He points out that adults contend with a number of issues and relationships that vie for attention in the overall life story of a particular friendship as well as within each individual's social world, suggesting that "friendships are doubly embedded and therefore doubly contingent" (Rawlins, 1994, p. 280). Individuals must not only put forth the effort to sustain particular friendships among other competing social relationships, they must also adjust to changes in the friendship as each partner's social world changes over time. For example, a friend who marries or accepts a new job responds to the responsibilities and relationships born out of these new life changes and therefore requires both partners to enlist interactional strategies that

jointly enact the continuity of their relationship. In other words, friends are constantly (re) negotiating what it means to sustain their relationship with one another against the competing demands of their multi-faceted social worlds (Rawlins, 1994).

When the binding ties that once characterized the nature of friendship become untethered, individuals often used the phrase “growing apart” to describe a natural or gradual loosening of their connection to one another, as well as a personal and separate progression (Rawlins, 1994). Participants reported handling discontinuity of their friendships in different ways depending on the history of the friendship itself. For example, connections to context specific friends such as a work colleague, or individuals present only for a short period time were not expected to sustain the relationship like those friendships built from more intimate, meaningful bonds. Several participants indicated that certain past friendships continued to live on through their own thoughts and memories, as one individual explained:

It doesn't matter how far apart we get or how often we see each other, especially if it's somebody that you don't have a chance to see very often. It's just like you know they're out there somewhere and they know you're out there somewhere . . . it's just that we don't have the time to actively nurture the friendship (Rawlins, 1994, p. 289).

However, when distant friends did make the time and effort to restore a one-time close friendship, respondents indicated the shared experience of ‘pick[ing] right up with the friendship’ (Rawlins, 1994, p. 291) no matter how much time had passed.

In summarizing his findings, Rawlins (1994) identified three modes of sustaining friendship: (1) active, (2) dormant, and (3) commemorative. *Active* friendships retained

the expectations for availability, contact, and emotional commitment no matter the time or distance. *Dormant* friendships revolved less around the expectation of being there for the other at a moments notice, but the assumption remained that the friendship continued to exist or that re-initiating the relationship was a possibility. *Commemorative* friendships were those that existed solely as fond memories and involved reflecting on the shared experiences and time spent with friends from the past. While active mode friendships expect reliable and continued interaction, the conditions for sustaining dormant and commemorative friendship are more ambiguous. What are the assumptions that lead a friend to surmise that a dormant friendship still exists? At what point do dormant and/or commemorative friendships become re-activated? The answer to these questions rely on the fortitude of one or both of the relational partners to reinitiate the friendship by establishing contact with the other to see if, in fact, a friendship still persists. The task of the present study is to examine the phenomenon of two friends reconnecting after experiencing an extended period of communicative dormancy. The term *refriending*, as defined above, is used to encapsulate the phenomenon of reinitiating a friendship. While no previous research exists that focuses on this particular social phenomenon, Sigman's (1991; 1995) discussion of continuity coupled with Rawlins' extensive qualitative research on friendship provides impetus for this study. The following section advances five research questions in this direction.

Research Questions

As the above review of research shows, friendships produce unique challenges as a particular type of interpersonal dyad due to the voluntary, yet interdependent nature of the relationship and the expectations of what it means to be a friend to another. The

environmental (e.g. proximity), situational (e.g. availability), individual (e.g. attractiveness, social skills), and dyadic (e.g. reciprocal liking, self disclosure) factors are the stepping-stones toward friendship development while the lack of any one (or several) of these factors may also contribute its deterioration (Fehr, 2008). However, when considering the notion of refriending, motive must play a role in one's desire to reinitiate or respond to (or not respond to) communication with a past friend. Defined as "a relatively general disposition which will influence actions that are expected to lead to a particular types of consequence or goal" (Atkinson, 1964, p. 14), motive influences one's interpersonal communication behaviors based on an individual's need for inclusion or the including of others, the desire for control over others or the handing over of control to them, and to exchange affection (Schutz, 1966) as well as providing relaxation, pleasure and escape (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988). Motivation to communicate has also been linked to a person's life position in terms of their physical health, life satisfaction, financial security, and the opportunity for interaction (Graham, Barbato, & Perse, 1993).

The motivation to refriend may also rise from the desire to collect information about the other after a long period of disconnect. The call of curiosity might lead one to reduce uncertainty between what was once known about the friend in the past and what is unknown about him or her in the present (Berger and Bradac, 1982). Uncertainty is defined "as a function of the number and likelihood of alternatives that may occur" (Knobloch, 2008, p. 134) that surround interactional episodes and develops "when people lack information about themselves and others" (Knobloch, 2008, p. 134). Thus, a primary function of communication serves the achievement of certainty while reducing or managing uncertainty through the gathering of information (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

The motivation to refriend might mirror the factors that sparked the friendship in the first place, or perhaps establishes a new pattern of relational development. To this end, this study examined the following research question:

RQ 1: What are the motivating factors to reconnect with a past friend?

In this same direction, a friend might avoid the opportunity to re-establish contact with the other. Therefore, the following research question was asked:

RQ 2: What factors would deter or prevent a possible reconnection with a past friend?

Friendship development reveals a *process* of meaning-making revolving around the reciprocal exchange of information (i.e. self-disclosure) where commonalities and differences are identified that work toward enhancing mutual liking. Process literally refers to “a series of actions or operations conducing to an end” (Process, n.d.), but this definition only partially applies to this study of friends re-relating. While process does pertain to repeated patterns over time, arriving at teleological end does not fit a dialectical/dialogical model of interpersonal relating that views meaning as emerging in the ongoing struggle between “the interplay of competing discourses” (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). A conversation is an unfolding, reoccurring process that contains words strung together to form sentences in a give-and-take exchange laced with different discourses of meaning (Conville, 1998). Meaning that emerges from this process might be temporarily be stable but the potential for new meaning(s) can develop with the next utterance or conversation. For example, a dialogic perspective views certainty as a monologic achievement voiced through centripetal discourses of dominant, taken-for-granted meanings, but these meanings may only produce a “contingent certainty” (Baxter &

Braithwaite, 2009, p. 31) renegotiable in the next interactional moment. The achievement of certainty, then, becomes less of a dialogical concern that positions communication as a product of uncertainty in the ongoing process of meaning-making. In this way, a relationship itself can be viewed as an unfinalizable process shaped by the ongoing, fluid nature of meaning-making (Conville, 1991). Therefore, the next research questions asked:

RQ 3: How is the process of refriending communicatively accomplished?

The theories above suggest how friendships grow and deteriorate from a number of different factors. Once two friends have reconnected, each is faced with the effort(s) toward sustaining the friendship as an active friendship or allowing the relationship to slip back into memory. Perhaps a new kind of friendship takes hold that supports an updated version of the relationship born out of the old one. Or maybe the novelty of reconnecting with a past friend was enough to satisfy curiosity of the moment and no further contact was desired. In any case, certain factors contribute to the level of continued interaction beyond the refriending experience, prompting the following question:

RQ 4: Why do some reconnections last and others do not?

A final area of inquiry centers directly on the emerging dialectical tensions of interpersonal relating. Tension develops at the intersection of opposing tendencies; for example, when one friend desires less involvement with the other (autonomy) while the other friend seeks more involvement (connection). Responding to this tension, the two friends negotiate between the competing desires for both autonomy and connection at different times throughout the course of the relationship. The “both/and” quality reveals

the intrinsic nature of relating out of the unity of opposition that ultimately leads to change in the relationship. Each friend carries with him or her a backdrop of knowledge from the earlier friendship that can work to facilitate or impede the process of refriending. At once, each responds from the roles of both friend and stranger, recognizing familiar characteristics embedded in a shared history with the other while discovering new information that adds to the story of their relationship. The tension between the *given* (i.e. information residing in long-standing memories) and the *new* (i.e. information of the moment) (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) creates unique dialectical challenges during the process of refriending that led to the following research question:

RQ 5: What dialectical tensions are in play during the refriending process?

These questions were designed to provide an overall picture of the refriending experience and add to the understanding of the interpersonal communication process of (re) relating. The following sections outlines the method designed to uncover these varied experiences and interpreting their meaning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Social scientific research supports several conventional paradigms of inquiry each of which represents the basic beliefs, or worldview, of the investigator and associated methodological approaches to research. However, the core concepts supporting these paradigms can be broken down into two fundamental perspectives of reality: a subjective reality and an objective reality. The naturalistic paradigm favors a constructivist's ontological position where multiple "and sometimes conflicting realities are the products of human intellects" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Such realities are not absolutes but are subjective, malleable constructions from an interdependent relationship between the researcher and the object of investigation. This is in contrast to the positivist paradigm whose ontological position supports a single, objective view of reality existing apart from the researcher who remains independent from the object under investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To explore the distinctive event of friend (re) relating, a qualitative research trajectory born out of a phenomenological perspective is followed in support of a hermeneutical investigation of experience.

The goal of the qualitative researcher is to understand a particular social behavior from a holistic view of the phenomenon garnered from multiple participant perspectives. Creswell (2007) describes the process of naturalistic inquiry as an emergent, qualitative approach to research where "all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data" (p. 39). Positivistic inquiry follows strict systematic procedures bound by a cause-and-effect relationship of understanding whose research design seeks to control for certain variables in order to explain and

predict outcomes of behavior (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). A qualitative researcher observes the world up close, interpreting the individual or cultural experience for the world, “attempting to make sense of, or articulate, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 3). As such, this study used phenomenology not as a method of investigation, but as methodological primer; a way of preparing the reader (and the researcher) for the study of a particular communicative experience and the methods used to investigate and interpret our social world (Patton, 2002).

To get at what constitutes a study of experience, it is important to provide a brief methodological foundation that will help elucidate the research process for investigating experience. Van Manen (1990) defines methodology as the “philosophical framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human experience . . . associated with or implied by a certain research method” (p. 27). As such, the outset of this chapter may well be thought of as the “theory behind the method” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 27-28) based on Martin Heidegger’s interpretive perspective of phenomenology and Hans Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical task in the discovery of meaning. While the impending discussion in no way accounts for all of the phenomenological currents contained in their respective volumes of work, it will illustrate some of the philosophical currents running through this qualitative investigation of experience. Once the methodological foundation is laid, the discussion then moves to the methods of participant recruitment, data collection, and open coding analysis.

As a starting point, a textbook definition of phenomenology serves as a seed for understanding the term as it develops to reflect the philosophical underpinnings of its

users, for as an intellectual pursuit, “Phenomenology was not founded: it grew” (Spiegelberg, 1975, p. 3). According to Littlejohn (2002), “Phenomenology is the study of the knowledge that comes from consciousness, or the way you come to understand objects and events by consciously experiencing them” (p. 184).

Heidegger’s Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger’s contributions to phenomenology grew out of the philosophical precedents advanced by his one-time mentor Edmund Husserl whose method of Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction focused on *describing* experience. As a mode of inquiry, Husserl’s phenomenology is an epistemological endeavor because it revolves around a process for extracting the structures of consciousness to provide a description of the experience. The investigator seeks to answer, “How do we know what we know?” and concentrates on preserving objectivity through a method of bracketing out one’s presuppositions in order to identify the essence of experience. Heidegger’s aim, however, was to move beyond mere description and focus on the subjective *interpretation* of experience inspired from a different question: “What is Being?”

Heidegger articulated his phenomenological premise from the two parts of the term itself. First, he interpreted ‘phenomena’ as “the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to the light” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51), suggesting the things that remain hidden are the “meaning . . . and . . . ground of what shows itself” (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 382). Second, Heidegger conceptualized ‘logos’ as the discourse of “letting something be seen” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 56). The ‘something’ that requires uncovering, or interpreting, is the meaning of *Dasein*, (i.e. human existence) that is, in fact, the

underlying premise of Heidegger's existential phenomenology and his approach to interpretive inquiry (Spiegelberg, 1982).

Heidegger's (1962) notion of Dasein suggested one's being-in-the-world requires "having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go . . . considering, discussing, determining" (p. 83). Heidegger views Dasein not only as a structure of human reality but a structure of the world where Being manifests itself, thus our way of being-in-the-world and the way the world is are not separate events (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). The study of Dasein is ontological because it seeks to understand what it means to be a person, or rather, explores the question, "What is Being?" (Heidegger, 1962). The way we come to understand our being-in-the-world unfolds hermeneutically.

Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics finds its origins in Greek terminology meaning to clarify, explain, "rendering the obscure plain, the unclear clear" (Bauman, 1978, p. 7). Originally viewed as a tool in the search for authentic understanding of historical texts, including the Bible, hermeneutics advanced beyond description and critique of the author's immanent domain of meaning prominent in seventeenth and eighteenth century textual and artistic analysis. With the rise of the natural and social sciences throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the hermeneutical task shifted focus to interpreting and uncovering the varied meanings hidden in the text (Bauman, 1978), a task at the forefront of Heidegger's philosophy of Dasein.

To get at the question of Being, Heidegger (1962) articulated hermeneutical phenomenology as a method for understanding Dasein, one's own being-in-the-world

that “has, ontologically, a circular structure” (p. 154). He rejected the common notion of interpretation where meaning and signification are additive components to a given object. Instead, he held that interpretation “is grounded in *something we grasp in advance*—in a *fore-conception*” [italics in original] (p. 150). We bring into our interpretation these fore-conceptions toward our understanding the unfamiliar, moving back and forth between interpretation and understanding (Grondin, 1994). How then are the manifestations of being brought into the open for interpretation? For Heidegger, the answer lay in the constitutive nature of language:

Language is the house of Being. In its home [the hu]man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of Being insofar as they bring the manifestation to language and maintain it in language through their speech (Heidegger, 1977, p. 193).

Heidegger’s assumption that language shapes our being-in-the-world suggests that we are “relational not individual, social not psychological” (Stewart, 1995, p. 27). His view of communication dislodged the idea that we merely transmit information from one person to another, but rather our being-in reflects being-with others (Heidegger, 1962) where our world “becomes manifest in speaking with one another” (Heidegger, 1985, p. 263).

However, where Heidegger’s hermeneutics concerned the interpretation of Being, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy focused on understanding.

Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Like Heidegger before him, Hans-Georg Gadamer sought to “explicate further the nature of direct language experience” (Deetz, 1973, p. 44)

focusing specifically on how understanding takes place. Deetz (1978) explained Gadamer's concept of understanding as historical, linguistic, and dialectic.

Understanding is historical in that one's prejudices are products of one's own history preserved and renewed, that is, one's own tradition. Prejudices in this instance are not negative preoccupations that need overcoming but are "biases of our openness to the world" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9). Openness does not negate bias but illuminates prejudices and raises questions in response to other possible prejudices. In linguistic terms of understanding, Gadamer (1975) maintained, "language is not just one of man's possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all" (p. 401). As purveyors of language, we speak from a linguistic tradition of understanding that shapes our interpretation of experience. Like the bond between human being and tradition, language and understanding are inextricably bound to one another, always developing and expressing the "manifestness of the things encountered, the reality that comes to meet us (Palmer, 1969, p. 227). Quite simply for Gadamer (1975), "Language . . . is the medium of hermeneutical experience" (p. 345)

Lastly, but certainly not of least importance, Deetz (1978) identified the dialectical implication of Gadamer's notion of understanding. Central to the hermeneutical equation lays the claim that the meaning of a text extends beyond the author's intention suggesting that "understanding is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive act as well" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 264). Both listener and speaker engage one another linguistically out of their respective historical *horizon* but each also interprets within a horizon of the present (Deetz, 1978). Gadamer (1975) built on Husserl's notion of horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a

particular vantage point” (p. 269) and thus imagines understanding as “always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves” (p. 273). All understanding builds upon itself through interpretive refinement from the dialectical nature of conversation—the back and forth of asserting perspectives out of divergent traditions—to arrive at a new understanding beyond that which was understood before and remains open to reinterpretation again (Deetz, 1978). Understanding thus involved not only one’s prejudices, but also the identification of appropriate prejudices from past interpretive endeavors that work to elucidate understanding in the present (Grondin, 1994).

As shown above, the epistemological foundations of Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology support a descriptive approach to experience, while Heidegger and Gadamer’s hermeneutical position encompasses an ontological view for interpreting and understanding experience. Maintaining objectivity is central to Husserl’s phenomenological investigation while Heidegger and Gadamer invite subjectivity into the understanding of experience. The preceding discussion of the guiding tenets from these philosophers present an argument for using a qualitative research method for investigating people’s experiences of reconnecting with a friend. It is a study of phenomena as participants articulate their own communicative experience(s) of reconnecting with a friend as a product of our being-in-the-world. It is hermeneutical in nature as researcher and participant enter into a dialectical activity of discovery in light of what they already know, constantly comparing segmented interpretations to a meaningful whole, and back again. Taken together, these methodological considerations provide support for the method of study outlined below and may very well mirror the reconnection event itself, “For there old and new grow together again and again in living

value without the one or the other ever being removed explicitly” (Gadamer, 1960, p. 289). As noted earlier, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the motivating factors to reconnect with a past friend?; 2) What factors would deter or prevent a possible reconnection with a past friend?; 3) How is the process of refriending communicatively accomplished?; 4) Why do some reconnections last and others do not?; 5) What dialectical tensions are in play during the refriending process? To answer these questions, this study proceeded as outlined below.

Sampling and Participant Recruitment

To explore these and other possible variances of the refriending experience, purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2005) was used to generate a pool of participants. This type of sampling allowed for deliberately choosing “settings, persons, or activities . . . in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 89) and provided ample latitude to learn as much as possible about a particular event from a specific pool of participants (Stake, 2005). For example, to examine the different perceptions of intergenerational communication, researchers only selected adult participants under the age of 25, and between 63 and 91 years of age (Harwood, McKee, & Lin, 2000). From participant interviews, researchers then developed a hierarchy of conversations among younger and older adults.

To gather a pool of participants who have experienced the process of refriending a specific form of purposive sampling was used called snowball sampling (Weiss, 1994). With this type of sampling, participants were solicited by asking a number of people who they know might have experienced the phenomenon of refriending. For example, from a discussion of my project with a close friend, he was able to identify at least three people

he knew had experienced reconnecting with a friend, including one friendship where both relational partners can speak to the process of refriending with each other. Additionally, participants were located through the University of Mississippi's faculty/staff email announcement list.

After receiving approval from USM's Institutional Review Board, an announcement seeking study participants was sent out through USM's faculty/staff email list. A copy of the recruitment email is provided in Appendix A.

To be included in the study, participants were required to meet the following three criteria: (1) they must have experienced reconnecting with someone they consider(ed) a good friend. The definition of a good friend may vary among subjects so I will provide the following description for participants to identify a good friend as "somebody to talk to, to depend on and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with" (Rawlins, 1992, p. 271). Siblings, spouses, and (ex)romantic partners will be screened out; (2) participants must be able to recall and discuss at least one refriending experience. This can vary depending on several factors, for example, how long ago they experienced their particular refriending event, the length of the reconnection event, and the overall significance of the event to the participant; (3) participants must be willing to engage in further phone or face-to-face interaction with the researcher (with at least one additional exchange via email, phone, or a face-to-face meeting) for clarification of responses and follow-up questions. Interviews took place at times and places agreed upon by the interviewee and interviewer with phone interviews and/or online video chat serving as a substitute for face-to-face interviews if geographical distance makes travel impractical.

Participants

A total of 15 people (nine females and six males) were recruited for participation in this study. All participants signed the appropriate Informed Consent form required by The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board outlining the study's procedures that also assured the protection of their anonymity. Table 1 shows the pseudonym created for each participant, their age, and years of relational dormancy that accounts for the length of time friends were out of touch with each other.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Information

Name	Age	Years of Relational Dormancy
John	20	2
Julie	23	6
Kim	24	< 1 year
Tanya	25	3
Dan	25	3
Lisa	26	12
Thomas	35	20
Allison	42	10
Roger	43	19
Ethan	51	25
Karen	52	30
Tracy	53	17
Carol	55	30
Michelle	56	20
Eddie	65	n/a

Participants ranged between 20 and 65 years of age ($m=39.6$) with the average time of relational dormancy expanding 14.7 years. Sixty percent of the participants were students (33% undergrad; 66% graduate) with the remaining respondents holding professional positions, and one semi-retired. Purposive selection allowed for the shaping of a smaller pool of respondents to maximize the range of dissimilar forms of the refriending process. For example, Miller (2007) interviewed 23 individuals whose occupational backgrounds in human services (e.g. counselors, social workers, ministers, teachers, etc.) provided the qualitative data that led him to identify three factors (i.e. noticing, connecting, and responding) in the process of compassionate communication in the workplace. Similarly, respondents with varied experiences of the refriending process captured a range of perspectives that reflect both positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon across different age groups and among both females and males.

The Interview

In the social sciences, “the interview is the favorite methodological tool for the qualitative researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 36) because it brings to the surface the thoughts, feelings, and emotions tied to a person’s experience of a particular event that might otherwise be forgotten. Researchers have used interviews to examine a number of different contexts and issues related to friendship. Some of these topic areas include, but are not limited to workplace friendships (Milner, Russell, & Siemers, 2010; Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, & Fix, 2004); cross-sex friendships (Shafer-Hand & Furman, 2009); long-distance friendships (Johnson et al., 2009; Finchum, 2005; Johnson et al., 2009); women’s friendships (Martinez Aleman, 2010; Weinstock & Bond, 2000); friendship

across different cultures (Cargile, 1998; Chen, Drzewiecka, & Sias, 2001); and broken friendships (Casper & Card, 2010).

In qualitative studies of friendship, Rawlins frequently used interviews to examine the complexities of friendship across the life course. In one study, Rawlins and Holl (1987) transcribed open-ended interview responses from 32 eleventh graders to explore the various tensions associated with high school friendships, “regard[ing] their discourse as a vital resource which these young people use to both reflect and constitute their social worlds” (Rawlins & Holl, 1987, p. 346). Similarly, Rawlins (1983) mined interview data to investigate the management of interactions among twenty-something-year-old close friends where the use of participant descriptions of conversations “acknowledges that the actor’s meanings themselves are interpretations of negotiated, lived contexts” (Rawlins, 1983, p. 3).

A final example, and one that provides a methodological blueprint for the study of refriending, reveals a phenomenological and descriptive approach in the use of open-ended interviews to illuminate the *experience-near-concepts* (Geertz, 1976) of adult descriptions about their friendships (Rawlins, 1994). Geertz defined an experience-near-concept as “one which someone . . . might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others” (p. 223). As previously laid out, this project incorporates a phenomenological lens through which to explore individuals’ descriptions of their refriending experiences and consider experience-near-concepts as a way of centering focus on the meaning retrieved from these personal experiences.

To accomplish the task of collecting data from people's experiences of refriending, an informal conversational interview guide was used to support an interview-as-topic-perspective (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Patton, 2002) where the questioning and probing of answers emerges from the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. This type of interview allowed for more flexibility in exploring particular answers in greater detail. Questions also came from a structured interview guide to ensure consistency in the prompting of answers. A devised combination of structured and unstructured interview formats allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the similarities and differences among participant's experiences. A copy of the interview guide is provided in Appendix B. All participants were interviewed in a face-to-face, except for one participant who was interviewed over the Internet using Skype. Interviews were digitally recorded and lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and a half.

Data Analysis Procedures.

A thematic analysis of participant interviews was used to explore the refriending experience. A thematic analysis involves the identification of patterned responses (i.e. themes) found in the data that relate directly to the research question(s). This type of analysis requires flexibility on the part of the researcher in determining what constitutes a prevalent theme, but in essence it should capture something that speaks to the investigator's inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, a prevalent theme might be a response that appears most frequently throughout the data, or perhaps a few mentions of a particular idea might reveal an alternative, marginalized theme. The overall goal of this analysis is to identify a set of prevalent themes that capture peoples' experiences of reconnecting with an old friend.

To search for these themes, a process of open coding was used to “open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). Based on the inductive framework of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), open coding provides a systematic method for the reduction and categorization of qualitative data. Participant interviews were dissected and examined to identify significant concepts and then reassembled into 12 categorical schemes to reveal what is going on in the text. As a process, open coding worked to simplify the complexity of people’s responses to the investigator’s questions that begins once the interviews are completed.

First, responses from each participant recorded interview were transcribed by the researcher. This also served to familiarize the researcher with the data. Next, a second analysis of the data was conducted to identify the most pertinent information for transcription. This process involved breaking down the parts of each interview into bits, or units, for analyzing the data (Neuendorf, 2002) identified as a phrase, sentence, or an entire paragraph (Canary & Canary, 2007). As responses were reviewed and units of thought identified, the researcher made notes of particular statements and key phrases revealing aspects of the refriending experience. Here, the goal of open coding was to conceptualize what is going on in the text and assign a label (i.e. code) to that particular action/interaction, or event (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A total of 53 themes emerged from the initial pass of the data. Once the key themes were isolated and labeled, the resulting information was saved as a Microsoft Word file for each participant interview.

After completing the initial coding of concepts identified in the data, attention turned to grouping together similar concepts, also referred to as categorization (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). This involved listing and comparing the codes to one another and grouping together those codes that appeared similar. Each group, or category, represented a classification of concepts named according to the researchers own understanding of what a particular pool of concepts evoked. A total of 21 categories were identified from the 53 themes that emerged in this step of opening coding.

Using these named categories, transcripts were coded again to see if the categories could be further distilled into classification schemes, or subcategories, based on the attributes of a particular concept. Notes and memos generated during coding helped to further develop codes and refine categories to reflect a deeper level of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The process of revisiting the text was repeated until it was determined that the categories reached a point of saturation where no further interpretation (i.e. reduction) of categories was possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A final total of 12 categories and 13 subcategories resulted from the content analysis of participant interviews. As a result of inductive analysis and open coding, categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive, meaning that each coded unit of analysis fit into only one category, and each coded unit of analysis was assigned to a category.

A table was developed to illustrate a typography of named categories/subcategories that revealed the interpretation of participants' refriending experiences. Additionally, excerpts from the interviews of participants talking about their refriending experience were pulled out and used exemplify the coded results.

Establishing quality and credibility. To address issues of quality and credibility, this research project centered on the issue of validity that refers to the "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of

account” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106). Information from two different sources of evidence worked to enhance the validity of this study. One source came from the coded interview data itself, and the other from respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005). After transcribing each interview, participants were emailed a copy of their coded interview to validate their transcribed responses to the interview questions, and this also gave them the opportunity to offer feedback to the researcher’s interpretations drawn from the data. Of the 15 participants, nine approved their transcribed responses while six participants returned their transcriptions with minor clarifications. No participants deleted or rejected any part of their initial interview responses.

In terms of generalizability, there was no effort to make sweeping universal claims drawn from a few cases reflective of the larger population, for we reside in a context-bound social world with too many fleeting variables that challenge the containment of an objective reality (Cronbach, 1975). Instead, attempts for *naturalistic generalizations* were made drawn from these personal experiences so that people can extrapolate understanding and meaning from the information provided to them through the way they usually experience it, through the experience itself (Stake, 1978). Participant responses from their respective refriending are explicated in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Results are organized around 12 thematic categories and five research questions. As previewed in the previous chapter, thematic categories emerged from a content analysis of participant responses about the experience of reconnecting with a friend. Table 2 lists each of these categories in order according to the number of participants whose responses were included based upon the content analysis of participant interviews. Each category is labeled and also shows the number of participants in that category, followed by a brief definition, and an example of a participant quote that pertains to the category. Five of the 12 categories contained subcategories that further delineated aspects of the same conceptual category. Although a participant may have contributed multiple responses to more than one category or subcategory, each response fit into only a single category, and is not repeated in any other category. Categories are discussed in more detail following the table.

Thematic Categories

Each thematic category emerged as clearly characterizing participants' experiences of refriending.

Technology. The theme of *technology* refers to the channels of mass communication that participants used as part of their refriending experience. A total of 21 code statements from all 15 participants (100%) discussed or mentioned technology as a factor in the refriending process. Two sub-categories emerged from the overall technology theme as *Facebook* and *other technologies*.

Table 2

Summary of Categories for Participant Refriending Experiences

Rank	Category/Subcategory	Category Description	Example
1.	Technology (15)	Channels of mass communication used in refriending.	
	a. Facebook	Participants statements about Facebook.	"This Facebook thing really does give control."
	b. Other Technologies	Participants statements about technologies other than Facebook.	"Mostly we communicate through phone conversations."
2.	Sameness (13)	Unchanged qualities of character/behavior of friend/friendship.	
	a. Familiarity	Recognized traits and behaviors of friend from past friendship.	"That's very much the same as it once was."
	b. No growth	Lack of progress in friends' lives.	"They never moved on."
3.	Interaction Routines (12)	Unfolding conversational processes during friending.	
	a. Catching up	Information exchanged between participants about their lives since disconnect.	"It was very recap."
	b. Topic avoidance	Topics of conversation participants avoided bringing up.	"A lot of them didn't go to college; you cant talk about that."
	c. Reciprocal caring	Mutual exchange of concern and support for the other.	"We have a tendency to compliment one another."

Table 2 (continued).

Rank	Category/Subcategory	Category Description	Example
4.	Comparing (11)	Participants comparing themselves to others.	
	a. Self to friend	Comparing self to refriending partner.	"How do I measure myself against people I know?"
	b. Friend to friend	Comparing refriending partner to other friends.	"We know those other friends may be there if you need them but not like the other ones."
	c. Friend to family	Comparing refriending partner to family.	"She's more family than my family."
5.	Rewards (11)	Positive aspects and/or outcomes associated with refriending.	
	a. Validation	Affirmation of friendship and of self.	"It never hurts to reach out and just kind of validate if someone's there."
	b. Gratification	Positive feelings associated with refriending.	"It made me feel young again."
	c. Completeness	Refriending fills a void in one's life.	"I don't see my life fulfilled without them."
6.	Difference (10)	Difference(s) between the past and present friend/friendship.	"Maturity-wise she was different as well."
7.	Friendship (9)	Defining qualities of a friendship.	"A friend is somebody who's going to be there during the tough times."

Table 2 (continued).

Rank	Category/Subcategory	Category Description	Example
8.	Sensory Experience (8)	Physical dimensions (i.e. sight, sound) of refriending.	“Hearing her voice was wonderful.”
9.	3 rd Party Involvement (7)	Influence and/or participation of individuals outside of reconnected friendship associated with refriending.	“Significant others and what not kind of come in the way.”
10.	Vulnerability	Affective risks associated with refriending.	“I’m okay with keeping people out. It keeps me safe.”
11.	Mortality	The topic of death revealed during refriending.	“There’s always a reason that person may be coming back because they have cancer; they just want to say goodbye.”
12.	Uncomfortable Situation	Sources of tension associated with refriending.	“It became a battle, though, kind of breaking down those walls, and that was stressful.”

Facebook. As previously discussed, Facebook is recognized as the most popular on-line social networking site with 1 billion active users across the globe (“Facebook Statistics”, 2012). Participants talked about how Facebook played a role in their refriending experience and in their own social lives in general. As a sub-category theme, eight participants (53%) revealed their ideas and opinions of Facebook as a social networking tool that played a significant role in reconnecting and maintaining

relationships for some, while serving a lesser role for others. For example, Kim discussed how it made the process of catching up easier:

I'd have to give credit to the advent of social networking. Whenever Facebook came on the scene we started communicating a lot more, and it made it easier because it's like she can come to my Facebook profile and see, you know, what I was doing, what I was up to, and I could go to hers. And so it made it easier in the sense that whenever we did get a chance to see each other or talk over the phone, you know, it wasn't like a backlog of months and months of stories, you know, or what's going on in each other's lives.

While Kim identified Facebook as a timesaving tool for getting reacquainted with her friend, Julie found it less of an overall factor in meaningful relationships:

I don't think it has any real value in establishing or maintaining significant relationships or friendships . . . I think it's a great gateway if you do just want to say 'Hey, what's going on?' but I don't think it affects anything much more than that, at least it hasn't for me.

Thomas mentioned how Facebook users' profiles, posts, and photographs allowed him to read about and see his friend before deciding to make the initial reconnection contact:

And so I determined after some of the posts on his Facebook page, and some of the stuff he was commenting about that we're probably pretty similar in some of those aspects, and so I do anticipate that I'll be getting together with him and catching up more in person.

For many participants, Facebook became the staging area for reconnecting with a friend, a neutral, common ground where both friends could, as Julie put it, “wade in and see how the water is.” She explained it this way:

Facebook gives you a lot of really good options for baby steps. Literally, friending them on Facebook, I think, is the big step because to some people that’s an entrance into their lives as it is. So even taking that very first step if you have to be the one that does it just to say, ‘I’m actually interested in some portion of your life.’ And then from there taking those small steps, maybe writing on their wall, ‘What are you doing?’ or sending them an email, ‘How are you?’ and then offering yourself, your phone number, your email address, whatever it is, to kind of open that door for them.

But just as the door swings open for some, it also closes on others, as Thomas observed, “Facebook, whether it right or wrong, has become kind of a tool for us to help filter some in and help filter some out.” Users are able to control the quality and quantity of information they share with others on Facebook, as Eddie illustrated when he compared the autonomy that Facebook provides to another channel of communication: “Facebook is like email. It gives you a chance to be very, like you do with traffic, you can be very aggressive or you can act out. It’s your own personality. Your shields are up completely.” Still, there are those who are weary of sharing too much information on Facebook, as illustrated by 42-year-old Allison who revealed a more ominous concern:

When you have what I call “Fan Club Members,” your stalkers, you know, they’re monitoring, and that’s something that I don’t care to divulge into. I grew up in an era where you’re mindful about what you put in print, and you don’t

want anything to bite you in the ass later. I believe in that concept, and to me [Facebook] destroys that concept all together.

Overall, participants referenced Facebook as a useful online social networking tool, but as with most tools, they are often one component in a larger repertoire. Participants also revealed other useful tools as part of their reconnection experience.

Other technologies. This subcategory emerged from participants identifying channels of communication they used in their reconnection experience apart from or in addition to Facebook. Seven participants (47%) mentioned using other means to initiate contact with their refriending partner or to maintain the reconnection. In some cases Facebook was not an option, as Dan said, “He doesn’t use Facebook. Mostly we communicate through phone conversations or text messages.” Tanya shared a similar experience with her refriending partner, stating “I’ll email her because she still doesn’t have a Facebook, she’s Twitterless, no LinkedIn, no other kind of account. Unless you go straight to her house, nobody but me can get in touch with her.”

Clearly, some participants were satisfied using one particular channel over another, as made evident by Tracy who reconnected with David ten years ago through email and has not used any other channel of communication to maintain the relationship: “It’s a very free feeling and maybe some safety that comes from the fact that it’s email.” Another participant felt limited by email saying, “It was a lot of late night phone calls just talking literally for hours, just talking; a lot of telephone, email occasionally. There wasn’t a whole lot of depth to the emails.”

The level of friendship also played a role in which channel a participant used beyond the initial contact, Roger explained, “The majority of people I’ve reconnected

with have been on LinkedIn. Most of the ones I've reconnected, I actually do phone conversations, the ones I consider good friends." The use of a particular channel also influenced the level of intimacy between refriending partners, as Karen stated, "We had a really nice visit on Skype, and I think if we did that very often we would be more open." Even with all of the technological options making it easier for people to initiate and maintain distant friendships, the desire and effort to reconnect still lies with the individual, Ethan revealed:

That part of the technology is frustrating. Either I can't find them and it makes [me] wonder even more what happened to them, or where they're at, or I find them and say, 'Hey, you want to be my friend?' and they don't respond, but sometimes it takes a while.

While technology can help answer many questions, it also may leave just as many unanswered.

In sum, technology played a large role in participants' reconnection experiences. While Facebook served participants in diverse ways and sparked a number of different opinions, other communication channels such as email and the telephone also helped them to initiate and maintain their reconnections.

Sameness. A second major category captured participant responses reflecting both the positive and negative aspects of unchanged qualities of character and behaviors associated with their friend, and the influence of these behavioral traits on the reconnection experience. A total of 13 different participants (87%) mentioned aspects of sameness divided into two subcategories of *familiarity* and *no growth*.

Familiarity. Nine participants (60%) commented on the ease of falling back into familiar interactional patterns with their friends, as well as recognizing particular characteristics of their friend that remained unchanged from the previous active friendship. For example, several participants echoed Allison's response when she first reconnected with Lucy, recalling, "It was like we never missed a beat. It was as almost as if we were still back at college doing the same things that we used to do." Likewise, Carol said, "We just picked up like we had spent the night at Judy's house on a Friday night after the football game." In fact, this was precisely the scene on the first night of her reunion with Judy and Claire after 30 years of being apart, as she remembered:

We were so inseparable to the point where like if we spent the night at each other's house, you know, being middle school, high school girls, we all slept in the same bed and there was a particular order that we slept . . . It was tears, but it picked up exactly where it left off to the point to where, this is going to sound even stranger, to the point to where when we got ready to go to bed, Judy has a four bedroom house, and we all just kind of sat there and stared at each other. We had gotten dressed for bed, and so she said 'You can have this room, you can have that room.' We just stood there staring at each other, and we said 'Uh, uh,' and then immediately went to t-shirts and football jerseys that we slept in, and all crawled into Judy's bed. Now we're talking 50 year-old women crawling into Pam's bed in the exact same order that we were.

For these three friends, the shared adolescent routines that once bonded them together reemerged in adulthood to bond them once again.

Participants also identified familiar qualities of their friend that remained unchanged. For example, when Tracy reconnected with David, she recognized “His sense of humor for sure; just a general niceness and supportiveness, the jokes, the humor, the same kind of humor that I have. So that’s very much the same as it once was.” Julie found this same familiar quality in her friend Trevor helped facilitate their initial interaction after 7 years of no communication: “Immediately it was his sense of humor,” she remembered. “We have such a specific sense of humor that is very in tune with the other and I think that’s what made it more comfortable because as soon as that phone call started, we kind of got into the groove of how conversations used to be.” Tanya also found that Mary maintained a familiar attitude from years passed: “She’s still positive. She’s still looking for more. She still has the memory. She remembers everything.” Similarly, Thomas recalled his early interactions with Chris: “And so as I was seeing some of the posts that he was talking about and we’re exchanging ideas and thoughts about that stuff, I kind of went, ‘Yep, I mean this sounds like the Chris I remember.’” For Thomas, the process of rediscovering shared attitudes and perspectives helped him and Chris revive a 20-year dormant friendship.

No Growth. Six participants (40%) commented on the fact that some of their friends maintained particular behaviors that signal a lack of progress in their lives. Where the previous category of *like we never missed a beat* focused on identifying familiar interactional patterns and personal characteristics that helped facilitate the reconnection process, the present group of responses reflected the static nature of the friend that, in some instances, deterred the participant’s desire to reconnect. For example, when Eddie tracked down some of his old friends, he found that, “For whatever reason, they never

moved on; they stopped. I see a lot of people I went to high school with that especially didn't go to college, they just are . . . stopped.” Lisa also discovered that some of her friends still clung to old behaviors, saying:

Then there are other people I hung out in high school with that, I guess I had a rebellious phase, and I got out of it, and they're not. It's when you read Facebook statuses and you're like, 'and you're how old, and this is for how many people to see? Get yourself together.'

Michelle recognized a similar behavioral pattern in her friend, Karla:

When we were in high school we kind of partied a lot, you know, but she's still doing that. She's still, like, has parties on the weekend at her house, people get drunk and do crazy things and it's kind of like she's stuck in that kind of partying atmosphere. She stays up like 'til 2:00 in the morning, 3:00 with these people and that's just not me at all now.

Even as a sophomore in college, 20-year-old John expressed dismay that some of his friends had not found new interests, saying, “I know I've only been in college for two years, but I've done a lot cool things since then, and I see people that didn't go anywhere and are still, you know, smoking pot with high schoolers.” For some participants, this perceived lack of growth contributed to their hesitation of wanting to reconnect with some of their friends. As Lisa explained:

It would more or less be that I wasn't really super involved with them to begin with or they just haven't grown up. I can be friends with people that still haven't gotten their act together, but I'm not gonna sit there and invest my time to, like, try to figure why they are the way they are.

Kim shared a similar view:

I definitely don't want someone, you know, be pulling a wagon of people that are just kind of like O.K. with where they are and they're not trying to move forward or progress or anything. I just feel like that's just kind of negativity, and I just want to shake it off.

Interestingly, while some participants perceived their friends' lack a progress as a negative aspect, Carol took a different view of friends and friendships remaining unchanged:

Having kids, and grandkids, and husbands, we know that the kids will eventually grow up and move on. The grandkids will grow up and move on, even though they'll still need us. But there's that friendship that won't grow up and move on. They're stability in our lives.

The reconnected friendship Carol maintains with Judy and Claire is a capsule of familiar attitudes and behaviors that provides relational consistency while other relationships moved in and out of her life.

In sum, participants recognized that many of the same positive attributes and attitudes that characterized their friend in the past remained as defining qualities that helped restore their connection to one another and facilitate interaction in the present. Even after years of inactivity, friends found it easy to fall back into old routines that shaped the previous friendship and helped in the process of reacquainting themselves to one another. Participants also recognized some of their friends maintained old behaviors that kept them from progressing in their lives, and while this deterred many from wanting

to reconnect, one participant found comfort in knowing her friendship would remain the same in spite of other life changes.

Interaction routines. A third major friendship reconnection theme captured participants' recollections of how their conversations unfolded during their reconnection event. Twelve participants (66%) commented on their initial interactions divided here into three subcategories of *catching up*, *topic avoidance*, and *reciprocal caring*.

Catching up. The discursive process of catching up entailed friends taking turns in recounting their individual lived experiences that transpired during the period of their shared relational dormancy. Seven participants (47%) mentioned these initial conversations that served to bridge the gap between what was known and unknown about themselves to the other. Ethan said he and his friend Kenneth “had to talk about who we knew in the past, and what was happening to the people that we knew, catch each other up on the scuttlebutt from everybody else.” Julie recalled her initial interaction with her friend as “one of those two-hour conversations where you talk about everything and talk about nothing at the same time.” Some participants remembered much of the conversation revolving around discreet, unobtrusive topics while others shared more detailed information about themselves. For example, Thomas indicated, “We really haven’t gotten into families, or religion, or anything like that. It’s just a lot of face value, ‘I agree with you on this,’ type of conversation.” Roger had a different experience:

None of the conversation was superfluous, or what I consider superfluous, like we didn’t talk about things like politics, we didn’t talk about pop culture, we didn’t talk about that. Everything in the conversation had to do with either what they were doing now, what I’m doing now, or what we had done to get there.

In another example, Tracy's reconnection with David provided them an opportunity to catch up and to also reveal a deeper, sustained admiration for the other:

It was a very recap, you know, 'I'm married, I've got two kids,' kind of thing. But it was also a little bit of pining, I guess, that talking about that he was very special to me and vice-versa and a big important part of my life at that time, and sort of an appreciation of that, statement of appreciation of that, both of us. And a tiny little bit of flirty fun kind of thing, but not in anyway creepy or anything like that. I think he even said something along the lines of 'Once in a while I think about what if,' but quickly followed that up with 'I've got this fabulous wife and great kids.'

Confessing their lingering feelings to each other allowed them to reestablish a close connection grounded in the security of their current relational lives.

Topic avoidance. Five participants (33%) indicated there were topics of conversation they avoided when they reconnected with their friend. Eddie, a 65 year-old semi-retired corporate executive whose climb to success began by first attending college, found the topic of higher education a touchy subject with some of his old high school classmates, as he explained, "A lot of them didn't go to college; you can't talk about that. They kind of regret it, and they kind of hold it against you if you did go." Julie, a 24 year-old graduate student at a mid-size university, also hesitated to discuss her academic endeavors with her friend stating, "It was uncomfortable for me to talk about school or anything that was kind of academically inclined because I was like I don't want to offend because you haven't experienced these things yet." While higher learning proved a vital

experience in their lives, both participants separated themselves from the issue to avoid any negative fallout during their reconnection.

Lisa avoided bringing up the illness afflicting her friend's father, while Tanya simply wanted to focus on the positive aspects surrounding the friendship, as she explained, "We don't really reflect on bad times much. That makes me feel good. We know they exist, but it's happiness when we're corresponding. It's good stuff." Dan felt he wanted to spare his friend from too much information about his own life during their initial reconnection because "we're just now back talking to each other. I'm not gonna dump all the stuff I got going on in my life on him." Here, Dan showed more concern for tactful interaction than his own agenda.

Reciprocal Caring. Four participants (20%) found that many of their conversations revolved around the routine of reciprocal caring by showing support and concern for one another. For example, Allison found that she and her friend fell back into past conversational routines when they reconnected after 10 years of sporadic communication. As she explained:

We have a tendency to compliment one another when we recognize something about them that we find extraordinary that's not within ourselves . . . that was something we were doing constantly back and forth, and it was almost like we were playing catch up with that . . . and it was something that we did ongoing throughout our relationship when we were in college all the way up until then. It was just a continuation of that.

Dan and his friend also expressed compassion for each other: "We talked about stuff; encouraging me about school, and I was encouraging, too," Dan remembered. "He was

really having conflicts and issues with his girlfriend . . . and he was telling me about what they go through. I was confiding in him, trying to give him positive information, you know, help him out.” When Tracy shared personal information with her friend after years of being out touch, she found affirmation and support in the process of catching up: “I’ve told him about hard things, like my dad was an invalid. I admitted to my warts,” she said. “It was just really difficult, really hard, and there were times I felt resentment, and I immediately got back this message that was understood, but realistic, but believable, and human, and it was ok essentially.” Even after years of no contact, these friends still found solace in each other.

In sum, participants indicated a number of interaction topics that unfolded during the process of reconnecting with their friend. While some participants revealed information at a deeper level, others kept the conversation more on the surface, or avoided particular issues all together. However, even after years of little to no communication between the friends, many of the friendships still fostered mutual caring and support.

Comparing. In the fourth major category, 11 participants (73%) discussed the idea of making comparisons or passing judgment about themselves and their friends as a result of their refriending experience. Three subcategories revealed participants made comparisons of *self to friend*, *friend to friend*, and *friend to family*.

Self to friend. Eight (53%) different participants talked about comparing their own life and accomplishments to those of their friends once they reconnected. For example, Eddie revealed his central curiosity associated with reconnecting:

How'd I do? That's what it's all about. Did I do well? The trick to it is after you've worked your entire career and your career's kind of at an end you say, 'Ok, this his how I ended up. How do I measure myself against people I know and knew?' So it's easy to do that.

While Eddie looked for comparisons at the conclusion of a successful career, Roger talked about what others thought of him after leaving his career behind to pursue a college degree:

Most of my friends have been very traditionally considered successful, you know, the U.S. idea of successful, the houses, the cars, the financial thing . . . so I'm kind of starting over. So I'm not there, but it's not my priority in my life, but it's nice that, it's not like jealousy or anything, it's just nice to see that they've succeeded in the things that they wanted to do. Sometimes I wonder what they think of me not doing the traditional type of thing, especially since when I lost touch with most of them I just got this great job. So I sometimes wonder if they, you know, 'Why is he not doing that anymore? Why is he not the regional manager?' That goes on.

Roger's respect for his friends' successes is countered with his uncertainty of the judgments they might make about his career choices.

In another example, Kim revealed disappointment in her own lack of timely academic accomplishments when compared to her friend's dedication:

I definitely think about it in the sense that she's turning 24 this weekend and she's going to graduate with her master's in May and then the fact that I'm still in my third year with my bachelor's. I definitely do compare and contrast in that way

and I am a little envious of her for that. I envy her but it's not really jealousy. It's just one thing where it's like 'I'm really proud of you,' or whatever 'but I wish I could be in your shoes.'

In another example, Tracy expressed the insecurities she felt after reconnecting with David and learning about his robust family life:

The thing that pops in my mind is that 'Gosh, he's a whole lot better parent than I am.' I don't have any biological children. I'm a stepparent, and they're really good parents, and they're better than I am. And that they kind of live life a little bit larger than I do . . . I'm sort of envious a little. I admire him for it so I like to hear about it. It's great.

After reconnecting with their respective friends, the disappointment Kim and Tracy harbored towards their own perceived shortcomings translated into envy and respect for their friend's success.

As Eddie noted earlier, he found it "easy" to compare and contrast his own life and accomplishments with those of his friends, but Tracy recognized the challenge of resisting this natural tendency when she caught up with her friend David. As she explained:

I come from a very academic family as well. It was kind of expected for me to do that and I kind of thought [David] would follow suit just in general. Well, that's what I want to do. I'm going to go get a degree and do these things, because we were always in that competition of who was first, who was better type of thing so it was kind of awkward to be like, 'Oh, you didn't go to college? Oh, what have you been doing?' Not to judge, try not to judge, pass judgment.

In another example, Tanya said, “I honestly didn’t compare myself. With other people I may, with old classmates. With her it wasn’t there, didn’t even think about, ‘Am I doing better in my life?’ because I was just glad she was doing well in hers.” While Tanya’s respect for this particular friend outshined any desire to make comparisons, Thomas explained that he avoids this behavior all together:

I don’t place a whole lot of emphasis on somebody’s social status, how much money they have, what their job is, what’s your title. So I’m kind of probably more of the exception than the rule as far as that goes, but I can absolutely see how a big chunk of people would want to get together and compare notes and look at their balance sheet, so to speak.

For Thomas, making such comparisons and judgments holds little value for himself or his social life.

Friend to friend. Reconnecting also prompted three participants (20%) to make distinctions between their reconnection partner and other friends, as illustrated by Carol who said:

They’re way above. Honestly, I’m speaking for the other two as well. We have our friends, you know, and they’re friends, they’re good friends, but there’s that different connection. Even though we know we have other friends, there’s no jealousy of the other friends . . . We know those other friends may be there if you need them but not like the other ones . . . because we grew up together, and when one went through it, the others went through it.

Here, Carol touches on the importance of shared history, a critical ingredient in refriending. Similarly, Michelle felt the experiences she shared with Karla still provided a unique bond even after 20 years of little interaction:

I told her some things that I wouldn't tell anybody else at that lunch, and I feel like I still can do that. It's just stuff that she would understand where as I have a friend here, a best friend, I wouldn't tell her that stuff.

For Michelle, her reconnected friendship provided particular opportunities for mutual understanding apart from the relationship she maintains with her best friend.

As mentioned earlier, Tracy maintains her reconnected friendship with David solely through email correspondence, but physical distance does not weaken her affinity for this relationship even as other reconnection opportunities present themselves. As she explained:

I honestly cannot think of any other friendship, you know, I might have come across someone here in town that I grew up with and we might have a nice conversation, but there's never been any follow up, and so this is really the one example that I have in my life, and it's been extremely rewarding for me.

Tracy recognizes her reconnected friendship with David as an ongoing and fulfilling relational experience built out of a shared history that perhaps leaves little desire for initiating and maintaining other friendships.

Friends to family. Lastly, three participants (20%) compared friends to family, as illustrated by Allison, who said about her reconnection partner,

She's more family than my family because there's a lot more trusting, a lot more open communication. I am able to be free with my emotions without judgment and even if there is judgment there is vocalization of why the judgment.

Carol claimed a similar bond exists between her and her two reconnected friends than with her own family members, saying:

We all have sisters, but you have an even longer history with your family, but there's things you couldn't tell your sister, but you could tell Judy and Claire . . . I'm closer to Judy and Claire than I am to my siblings.

While Carol privileges her two best friends over her family, Lisa sees no difference between the two when speaking about her relationship with Sarah:

I still consider her a member of my family. I still consider her family my family, and I never didn't. Even though we kind of lost touch for a while, I never didn't think of them as family just because of the amount of time, the saturation that we all had with each other.

Here, the friendship reflects the bond between two families who collectively share in the relationship between Lisa and Sarah.

To sum up *comparing*, participants compared and contrasted the relationships between themselves, their friends, and their own families. Some found making judgments and distinctions an inevitable part of their reconnection experience while others struggled against the inclination to do so. In short, reconnecting allowed individuals to size up their own accomplishments and relational ties in comparison to others.

Rewards. A fifth major theme represents what 11 participants (60%) identified as the positive aspects or outcomes of reconnecting with their friend. Participant comments revealed three different subcategories labeled *validation*, *gratification*, and *completeness*.

Validation. Five participants (33%) talked about how their reconnection made them feel special by authenticating not only a shared history, but also reaffirmed that one has not forgotten the other. For Lisa and Sarah, their reconnection helped them both to confirm particular shared experiences, as Lisa stated, “You want to make sure someone else can validate it, that we’re not making it up.” Outside of reclaiming shared experiences, Lisa also mentioned an altruistic reward of reconnecting with old friends:

It never hurts to, you know, reach out and just kind of validate if someone’s there.

Even if it was just they went to elementary school with you or something. I mean, refriending somebody, even sending little requests, that can make somebody’s day. It would be like, ‘Oh my God, she remembers me!’

Ethan experienced this for himself, relating that, “It was nice that he sought out me. I felt honored, so to speak. Damn, he went looking for me! That was pretty cool. That was the reward of it.” In this way, Ethan associated a feeling of relevance with his refriending experience.

In another example, Tanya believed that her friend Mary chose to remain disconnected from those she left behind after not returning to college in the fall semester: “She wasn’t returning anybody’s phone calls, no text messages, the school email she wasn’t replying to, she had deleted her Facebook page . . . she completely detached herself from everybody.” After three years of silence, Mary finally responded to one of

Tanya's many inquiries, and while interaction remains limited, Tanya feels a trusted, if not singular, relationship exists between the two of them. As she explained:

She's still distant; nobody knows I'm in touch with her. It's kind of kept that way.

It's kind of like unspoken; I'm the special person because I'm in touch with you and you actually made contact with me in spite of you disappearing.

Here, the reward is an exclusive friendship born out of Tanya's effort to find Mary whose delayed response finally validated their relationship.

Validation also emerged when participants used the reconnection experience to learn not only what had become of their friends, but also enabled them to look back on how their own lives had progressed, as Karen explained:

It gets you back in touch with where you've been, what you've been through, and you do look, not comparison so much, but you kind of look like, 'Gee, I remember when I was there in school with her. I wanted to be a med tech, and now not only am I a med tech, but I'm a university professor, and I have Ph.D. I'm doing alright' . . . just seeing where I was and where I am is fulfilling to think, 'Yes, I did follow through and the Lord helped see it through, too.'

Karen's refriending experience allowed her to take stock of her own accomplishments.

Gratification. Five participants (33%) described a number of positive feelings associated with their refriending experience. Allison described the experience of reminiscing with her friend as "almost euphoric" while Dan noted, "It's just a general happiness. You connect with a good old friend, somebody you can talk to." Karen said, "It was pretty exciting. It made me feel young again. It makes you think of happier times,

younger times, crazy times.” Tracy found that maintaining her reconnected friendship was an achievement in itself. She admitted:

I’m not good at keeping contact with friends and so it’s sort of like an accomplishment that we have rekindled this really close friendship . . . I like that in myself, that I have that capability, because I don’t think I’m the greatest at it necessarily.

She went on to say, “It’s a safe relationship with a male that doesn’t make my husband defensive in any way.” Here, Tracy’s accomplishment is two-fold as she maintains a successful relationship with male friend that does not threaten the bounds of her marriage.

In another example, both Julie and Trevor rediscovered a part of themselves when they began communicating again. As Julie explained:

The coolest thing that came out of that is that we kind of fueled each other’s creative personalities. He wrote a lot of music; I write a lot of poetry, but I hadn’t done that in a long time, and he hadn’t done anything like that in a long time. I guess our conversations and interactions fused a lot of creative energy.

Their reconnection helped spark a need for expression that once played a more vital role in each of their lives.

Completeness. Three participants (20%) mentioned that reconnecting with their friend filled an empty space in their own life. Tanya discovered that interacting with Mary again reactivated a part of herself tied to the past: “It’s to reconnect that missing part of yourself, and I can tell that she’s a missing part of myself” she said. “I think it makes me more complete because so much of my past got buried because there was

nothing to keep it active.” Dan’s notion of completeness proved more of a shared effort, explaining that, “When you have that conversation with somebody . . . somebody you can trust, you release yourself to them, they release themselves to you . . . then you all help each other. After that you feel whole, complete.” After getting back in touch with her two closest childhood friends, Carol realized the significance of her reconnection experience: “With Claire and Judy it’s like . . . I don’t see my life fulfilled without them. I don’t see them as not being a part of my life.” For Carol, these two friends are essential relational fixtures in her own life.

In sum, participants identified a number of rewards associated with their rekindling experience. Positive feelings of excitement and accomplishment emerged along with the fulfillment that came with validating shared experiences and personal accomplishments. For some, the reconnection experience transported them back to their younger self while helping them take stock of their own lives. Other participants found reconnecting helped to complete a missing part of themselves that serves both individual and relational needs.

Difference. A sixth major category refers to what 10 (67%) participants identified as difference(s) between the once active friendship/friend of the past and the friendship/friend since the reconnection. For example, participants referenced maturity to account for a noticeable change in the friendship from when they were younger, as Kim explained:

Just the fact that the dynamic of the friendship had changed over the course of the years, because, you know, we had both matured, and there were qualities that, like, shone through more than others did at the time whenever we were teenagers.

Allison recognized a more mature conversational tone after reconnecting with her friend Lucy, as she recalled:

Maturity-wise she was different as well. She seemed more calm about her choice of words because usually she'll just rant as I do without much thought, but that's ok. She's speaking deliberately but not worrying about how she comes across like in her tone, and it changed.

Lisa noticed the same change in the interactions with her friend, saying, "It wasn't, you know, 'Oh my God, stupid conversation!' It was, 'This is how I feel, this is what I believe. Oh you feel different? I can still support you in that because we're both adults.'"

While Allison and Lisa recognized a more grown up quality in their interactions, Tracy attributed maturity to her having a successful reconnection with David after 17 years of no contact:

We were settled to an extent in our careers and we're in our forties, mature enough to have a male/female relationship that was friendship without any sexual tension or anything like that. So I think it has to do with when we reunited.

Here, maturity affords both friends the comfort to explore and continue their friendship as adults.

While maturity was a noticeable difference in reconnection interactions, other changes became apparent as well. Karen identified a more noticeable change in her friend after being out of touch for 30 years, noting, "I think she's really grown in her faith, and she's very outgoing and very communicative about her faith. I didn't remember her being that strong of Christian when we knew each other." Kim and Alison attempted to remain

in contact with one another after separating during high school, but after losing touch for just under a year, Kim recognized a noticeable change once they reconnected:

Whenever I'm speaking about myself I feel like I've always just kind of been like the more serious, kind of studious one, and she's always been like the happy-go-lucky type, the glass half full. I definitely think she's changed to where she's a lot more serious and a lot more focused, and I still feel like the happy-go-lucky person is there, but it just doesn't really show through as much anymore.

Participants also found the accumulation of changes between themselves and their friend seemed to weaken the bond of the original friendship. John, who reconnected with a close childhood friend during his freshman year in college, noticed a subtle difference in their interactions:

I think that might just be guys getting older, or maybe not, I don't know. There's no hostility or anything, it seems like we've grown into two different people. He's more of an introvert; I'm more of an extravert. I mean we still have a great time; it's just, you can't find that click again.

John later admitted that, "We didn't connect the way we did," referring to a limited refriending experience. Michelle also discovered that after being out of touch with Karla for 20 years, little was left from their original relationship to carry into the reconnected friendship:

I don't think we can do that again because we're so different now. I mean we could become friends on a different level . . . I know that she still cares about me, and I still care about her, but it's kind of like she's got different interests than me now and we have less to relate to.

As shown above, participants identified particular aspects of change or difference in their reconnected friendships on both an individual and dyadic level. Although maturity and the natural tendencies of adulthood most often shaped these changes, the dissimilarities between friends also inhibited the friendship from moving into a new relational phase.

Friendship. The seventh category represents what nine (60%) different participants identified as the defining qualities of a singular, intimate friendship captured here as expressions of reliable alliance, a term introduced above that represents the qualities of belonging, trust, and acceptance essential to maintaining the bond between relational partners (Weiss, 1974). For example, Roger identified the salience of interaction as a discerning feature. As he explained:

Most people in this country call their acquaintances friends, and to me a friend is somebody who's going to be there during the tough times, and who's always there, and you can always talk about anything; there's not a, oh, we can't talk about this type of subject because that's taboo.

Allison's idea of a true friend extends beyond the friendship itself, saying, "I have basically about seven close friends, and when I say close friends I mean these are people I would trust my family's lives with." Carol offered a different sort of analogy of a true friend: "A friend's going to tell you, 'O.K., I'll come bail you out,' but a true friend's going to be sitting there saying, 'Man, did we mess up this time,' sitting there on the bench with you at the police station." For Carol, a true friend literally is a partner in crime whose fate is tied her own. In relation to friendship reconnection, Dan leaned on the words of another to describe his idea of a true friend:

Like another friend told me: ‘Dan, a true friend is somebody when you haven’t seen them in a long time, talked to them in a long time, maybe months or years, something like that, when you see them again, you all catch up and you all pick back up right where you left off. It’s not one person beating up the other person upside the head with guilt and manipulation.

For Dan, acceptance and forgiveness are the marks of a true friend. In another example, Carol talked about how being there for the other played out in the close friendship she shares with Judy and Claire:

I know that if I needed Judy and Claire all I would have to do is pick up the phone. Now I think we over-compensate. When Judy found out her mother had cancer she called me first, I called Claire, Claire went immediately to her house, and I was on the next flight. So we over-compensate when one needs us more than the other.

Here, the cherished alliance these three friends have with another is so powerful that they instinctively want to share in the other’s life changing event. As Carol said of their friendship “when one went through it, the others went through it,” but at times they can ‘over-compensate’ with their concern for one another.

Michelle realized the intimate bond she shared with Karla remained intact during their first face-to-face meeting, saying, “I feel like the day we were in the restaurant I kind of felt that connection again. I felt like I could tell her my darkest secrets again and that we still have that level, you know, I trust her.” Similarly, Tracy felt that the trust built up from her earlier relationship with David reaffirmed their close friendship, saying,

“Maybe at first I sort of presented the very best of me, but I think, very quickly, back into total disclosure among close friends.”

In sum, participants described their singular friendships in ways that elevated them above other friendships and acquaintances. As a condition for maintaining close relationships, the reliable alliance that forged these friendships together remained intact when the relationship went dormant, and resonated as a point of unification in the reconnected friendship.

Sensory Experience. The eighth category revealed eight (53%) participant references to the physical dimension of interacting with their friends. Even though 80% of the friendship reconnections transpired through channels (e.g. phone, Internet) other than a face-to-face encounter, participants identified a particular sensory (i.e. sight, sound) experience when they interacted with their friend again. For example, several participants echoed Cindy’s response when she reconnected with Karen over the phone: “Hearing her voice was wonderful.” Dan remarked that his friend Matt “sounded more mature,” while Tanya’s said, “I can actually hear her voice when I’m reading what she writes because the personality is still [there]. I see the smiley face and the ha ha.” Roger also mentioned *seeing* his friend, as he explained:

When I’m talking to him I can see him sitting back in his living room with his old roommate and the three of us chilling. So I get these mental pictures of what we did. So I’d hear his voice and it would kind of remind me because his voice hadn’t changed, and so it would just bring me back to things in the past. So even though we were talking about the present I’d get these mental pictures like we were hanging out again.

Just as hearing Joel's voice transported Roger back to their shared past friendship, Ethan heard his friend in a new, revealing way:

I'd never really seen him sad, sad, but when he was talking about his divorce, and missing his daughters, and the drugs he went through, and everything else, I could really hear the depression that I had never known Kenneth [to have] before because we were young and free and you didn't get depressed about stuff way back then. That was a side of Kenneth that I'd never known, but I was glad he shared it with me.

For these individuals, the sound of their friend's voice helped them experience their friends in old and new ways.

Actually seeing their friends for the first time after many years of separation also inspired a sensory experience. Eddie talked about what he felt after seeing photographs of old friends from the past and present:

We have a high school web site [where] you can see all their high school pictures, and now you see them now and you think, 'Oh, my God! What happened to all these people? I know I don't look like that; I still look the same way.'

Even when Carol reconnected with Claire through a face-to-face encounter, she saw her friend as she remembered her 30 years ago:

Claire is the oldest and she was beautiful. Built, you know, your ideal. Judy was your ideal. Very tall, coal-black hair, and then there was me, and I'm the youngest and I remind them of that quite frequently. Even though we've changed physically, it was like when I saw Claire, I didn't see Claire as . . . I just saw Claire as the last time I saw her.

Carol concluded that, “They may have left my life in the physical sense but they had never left my heart,” a sentiment inferred by many of the participants.

In sum, over half of the participants associated some kind of sensory experience when reconnecting with their friend. Whether solely through the sound of their voice, or via a face-to-face interaction, several participants talked about *seeing* their friends as a physical presence of the past reemerging in the present. In this way, the aural experience of reconnecting helped to reaffirm their social-emotional ties to one another.

Third-Party Involvement. The ninth category captured seven (47%) participant references to the influence and/or participation of individuals outside of the immediate reconnected friendship. For example, Kim talked about other relationships impinging on her reconnected friendship with Maria. As she explained:

Well, there’s kind of a string of relationships that have happened and so that definitely, I feel like, impedes our friendship since we’ve been friends for so long. It definitely, you know, significant others and what not kind of come in the way.

Dan shared a similar view:

I also made some really good friends up here, too, and that’s sad to say sometimes when you make new friends, and you stay busy with them in your new life, and your old friends can be put on the back burner a little bit. You’re not doing it on purpose, but sometimes it just happens like that. So that’s why I feel guilty.

While these friends may have struggled to fit their reconnected friendships within their current network of relationships, Roger talked about how he and Joel reconnected over dinner one evening with Joel’s girlfriend a part of the reunion as well:

Yeah, I would say when we got to the dessert part of the menu, they started bringing up, ‘Well, how’d you find Joel? What made you want to?’ type of thing and that’s when I told them about the accident that I had and how important it was, and as soon as that happened, they were both just like, oh, this *is* important, and they agreed. They were like, ‘Yeah we do, we get totally side-tracked in all these things that aren’t important in life and we stress about all these things, but it’s really friends and family.’

Here, the motivation behind Roger and Joel’s reconnection became a topic of conversation with both parties agreeing on the importance of maintaining close relationships in spite of life’s daily distractions. Roger continued:

It was kind of funny because after that [Joel] called the waiter over, gave him the camera; we all took pictures together, and then when we all went out after that, too. It was the chummy, you know, us joking around again, because he’s a practical joker. His girlfriend was being brought into this dynamic because he doesn’t do that around her, turns out, so she had never seen, even though they’d been dating three and a half years, she had never seen this side of his personality because all the sudden we were jabbing each other, kind of hitting each other, doing all the crap that we used to do. It was kind of a bonding thing.

For Joel, reconnecting with Roger served to not only reaffirm a relationship with a close friend, it also revealed a part of his character to his girlfriend, helping to bring him closer to these two important people in his life.

Participants also discussed the challenge spending time with their friends in the company of marital spouses. After initially catching up via email and phone, Allison

visited her friend Lucy and discovered their friendship now competed with other relational influences. As she remembered:

When I went to visit her for the first time with her new family, I was learning how to adapt if I was in a marriage situation because inside I was thinking, ‘I think I deserve all the time I can get with her, it’s not a big deal, and I came all this way, I deserve to take up all of her time.’ But then the realization is that her husband is there, he is a priority, her son is there, he is a priority, and I have to step back and realize that I am the third wheel in the picture. I was so grateful that she was communicating with me. She said, ‘Girl, I know you came all this way...’ and she was very empathetic about it because I was kind of stifling under my breath, ‘Man, why can’t we have the time together?’ and you know she was like, ‘We need to talk about this,’ and when we did I understood. I was like, I don’t like it, but yes, I understand.

While these two friends took the time to discuss the intrusion of outside relationship responsibilities on their time together, no such conversation took place between Carol and her two friends. As she remembered:

When we all got together with the spouses, they just kind of made their own friendship. It’s a good friendship, but it’s not the same friendship. They know that they need to be together because we’re not going to pay any attention to them . . . The husbands just follow right behind. They know that if the husbands are with us they need to fend for themselves because the girls are going to be together and do whatever.

Compared to issues evident in Allison and Lucy's reconnected relationship, the provisions of Carol, Judy, and Anita's close friendship momentarily superseded the time and attention devoted to their spouses.

In sum, participants identified challenges of outside relationships encroaching on their newly reconnected friendship. The bond of a friendship gone dormant that suddenly found new life within an active network of relationships both upheld and rearranged particular privileges of the friendship. The reunification also had to adhere to the responsibilities of third-party relationships.

Vulnerability. Six participants (40%) talked about the affective risks of opening themselves up to others as a consequence of reconnecting. For example, Julie described a distrust that continues to shadow her friendship with Trevor:

And it was just difficult to get past those barriers that, despite how good of friends we were in the beginning or even how far our friendship developed after a few months, it was still those barriers that, you're still a stranger to me at some level, and I'm not gonna let you into whatever I'm thinking, or whatever is potentially vulnerable, or whatever it was that to this day that still causes a lot conflict.

In another example, Karen recalled feeling upset over an abbreviated refriending episode:

There was one person in particular that I remember. She found and friended me, and I was all excited about talking to her, and I sent her message and I never heard another word from her. I see comments from her on Facebook, but they have nothing to do with me, and I'm disappointed about that.

Kim speaks directly to Karen's disappointment, saying, "I definitely wouldn't want someone to actively pursue refriending, you know, gaining my friendship back and then

just kind of pull away. I definitely would feel slighted. I definitely wouldn't want to do that with someone else." For both Karen and Kim, refriending comes with certain expectations that, when violated, leave them feeling 'disappointed' and 'slighted.' This translates into individuals feeling that their refriending efforts are not appreciated, or that their friendship is not as important to the refriending partner as it once was, but reconnecting online does present one particular advantage: "That's the brilliance of social networking," Kim said. "You can just use it as that barrier to protect yourself from indifference." Rather than be an active agent in refriending, individuals can also take a more passive role and observe others' online behaviors before deciding to refriend, as Thomas stated, "I think how the Internet has polarized people, you know, it's quicker, it's easier to hide behind anonymity and all that." Lisa suggested to lower one's expectations over the possibility of reconnecting with a past friend, saying, "If you psyche yourself up thinking that your kindergarten best friend is going to come back and be your best friend again...I would say don't put all your marbles to one person, just in case, kind of like self protection." Tanya expressed a similar view:

I've never really been the one to mark people as friends too quickly. I'm cool with many, close with few. For me to have even got close to her meant that she had status in my life. I'm ok with keeping people out. It keeps me safe.

In Tanya's case, self-protection is a primary concern in the process of developing and maintaining friendships.

In sum, participants expressed concern over the affective consequences associated with refriending, particularly with a focus on their own vulnerability. As the responses in this category revealed, participants showed concern for protecting themselves from

judgment, distrust, disappointment, and indifference when reconnecting with a friend.

Although Facebook provided a staging ground for rekindling a past friendship, the manner in which people used it as a tool to interact (or not interact) exposed them to the positive and negative consequences of participating in refriending.

Mortality. The eleventh category revealed that five participants (33%) mentioned the topic of death as it pertained to friendship reconnection. For example, Tracy talked about death as a shared experience in her reconnected friendship with David, saying, “[We’ve] been through some very important life events, the death of his father, the death of my father, his mother’s serious illness now, and impending death.” In a different direction, Allison mentioned her own father’s experience of reconnecting with old friends:

My father is reconnecting with all of his high school classmates. It’s really strange because his timing is crazy impeccable because, like, within months of his reuniting with these people, they’re passing. Not saying he’s the grim reaper, it’s just that reconnection is happening and he’s reconnecting with these people just in a time [as a] matter of reconnecting, reestablishing, reminiscing, and either making closures or just being supportive with those classmates.

Ethan talked about his own mortality as it related to past friendships and family lineage:

[With] Kenneth, neither one of us were saints, and I did my share of recreational pharmaceuticals, shall we say, but it’s like damn, I never got that far into it. What would have happened to my life had I gone down that path? With Daryl, Daryl is suffering liver [damage]; he’s looking at death; my father died of liver

[damage]...Daryl's younger than I am, you know? Damn, we drank a lot together; maybe it could be my liver.

Here, Ethan's mortality is a reflection of shared experiences with old friends that could have steered his life in a more perilous direction had he continued down a path reminiscent of his own father's fate.

Conversely, Thomas spoke of mortality as a regretful consequence of not reconnecting with a friend, saying, "Maybe that person dies in a car wreck three weeks after you reconnect with them, and if you wouldn't have reconnected with them you would never have had the chance to interact with them again." In a similar direction, Ethan recalled another experience that reified Thomas' statement:

There was another guy I reconnected with and I didn't write back. I thought about him every now and then, and he didn't write back, and then I found a year later he passed away like a month after we reconnected.

The thought of missing an opportunity to reconnect with a friend led Tanya to offer the following advice:

Listen to your heart, and trust it because there's always a reason that person may be coming back because they have cancer; they just want to tell you bye. Or, they could be on their deathbed or have lost someone significant to them and you were the only person after so many years.

For Tanya, our intuition responds to the ephemeral nature of life that can put us back in touch with those friends who might need us the most.

Participants related aspects of mortality to friendship reconnection in terms of shared experiences, coincidence, and missed reconnection opportunities. Although Roger

spoke earlier about his near death experience as a motivating factor to reconnect, many of these individuals referred to death in terms of timing and regret.

Uncomfortable Situation. In the final twelfth category, five participants (33%) talked about feelings of tension associated with their refriending experience. For example, Karen identified a source of tension when both friends initially struggle to find conversational topics after years of being out of touch, saying, “What’s interesting in the refriending process I found is that a lot of times you get that initial, Oh wow! And then, you’re like, you don’t know what to say because you don’t have any common ground anymore.” Dan experienced this uneasiness when he reconnected with Matt. As he explained:

It was tense because I hadn’t talked to him in years. It’s like, dang, you went off to California, you probably got new experiences and stuff like that and I’m still down here in Florida. That’s one of things going through my mind, and it’s like with any phone conversation, I’m like, what am I going to say? Because, I don’t talk that much, I’m really reserved unless it’s a subject that I want to talk a whole lot about. Normally, I’m just like, I prefer to do text messages that are simple and short compared to a phone call because if I don’t have that much to say and we’re sitting there talking, my mind’s like, jumping, like what am I going to say? I ran out of stuff to say. Ok, maybe I’ll bring the conversation to something about this.

You know, trying to figure out what I’m going to say.

While Dan struggled to find conversational topics with Matt, Julie and David ‘battled’ to regain their trust in one another, as Julie explained:

We both [had] become very guarded by this time. It [was] difficult to break through either wall, and that caused constant conflict. It's strange because we still knew each other very much after all this time, and so I would say, or he would say, 'You're holding something back,' or 'What do you really want to say?' or 'I know there's something you're thinking. What's the problem?' It became a battle, though, kind of breaking down those walls, and that was stressful; it was very stressful. It was very stressful to a) go through that and have to constantly battle that, and b) question whether or not it was worth it.

The conflict between these two friends developed out of the familiar, trusted friendship of the past, and the updated, unknown individual before each of them in the present relational moment.

In another example, Kim said the initial tension she experienced when she reconnected with Maria emerged from them being out of touch with each other in the first place:

It was just a little bit weird at the beginning and I do want to say that we did maybe get into a couple of little small scuffs about it or what not. You know, 'Why haven't you contacted me? Why are we always out of touch and talking only twice a year?'

Here, their commitment to one another is called into question as both reconnection partners struggled to understand the relational void that enveloped their once active friendship. Roger, however, keyed in on his friend's initial uneasiness when he saw him for the first time in 19 years. As he explained:

The face-to-face was a lot more joyous, a lot more exciting. When I drove up, I got out of the car and there was that thing where he was kind of, do I give him a handshake, do I give him a hug, type of thing. I just gave him hugs because it was a joyous thing and so as soon as I did that, I think that broke all the tension. I think, I'm not sure, but I think there's a little of that, you know, do I shake his hand? Do I give him a hug? Once that had happened, everything just kind of opened up.

Roger's embrace of his friend functioned to relieve the initial tension surrounding the uncertainty of the moment while reestablishing acceptable behaviors for their particular friendship.

In sum, participants mentioned aspects of tension or uneasiness as part of their reconnection experience. Individuals associated feelings of tension with not knowing what to talk about with their friend, as well as struggling to reestablish trust, and exercising appropriate behaviors of physical expression. While the desire to reduce uncertainty played a role in participants' motives to reconnect, the tension identified during particular moments of re-relating reflected the uncertainty associated with reconciling the relational closeness of the once active friendship with overcoming the relational distance of the reconnected friendship.

As shown above, the content analysis and resulting categories revealed refriending as a unique relational experience. The following section expands on aspects of some of the categories as they help answer the research questions and articulate the finer points of the refriending experience.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the motivating factors to reconnect with a past friend?

Participants were asked to talk about why they wanted to reconnect with their friend, or what would motivate them to refriend in general. Table 3 lists these motives in descending order according to the number of responses, and also provides a participant quote as an example of this motive.

Table 3

Refriending Motives

Motive	# of Participants	Example
Catch Up	7	“The reconnection was just to ‘catch-up’ with our life’s events.”
Maintain Relational Bond	5	“There are some connections that we have with people that I really hate to lose.”
Near-Death Experience	1	Back in 2005 I had a major accident . . . I realized the important things were really friends and family.
Responsibility	1	“She initiated it, and she’s the one who’s kept it going.”
Assess Friendship	1	“I guess I just wanted to test the friendship’s worth.”

While satisfying curiosity was the underlying motive for wanting to refriend, participants rationalized this motive in different ways. Seven (47%) participants stated that the

reconnection was just to catch up, or that they were interested to know what happened to their friend, as Thomas explained:

Mine would be empathy. When I form relationships with people, to me they're very important and they're very genuine. For me, I'd like to know some more about these things about his life, like, you know, how did the rest of growing up go for you? Was it cool? Was it terrible? There are just some unknowns there for me that I'd like to be able to write in the blank page for this guy, considering we spent a lot of time in our formative years together.

For Eddie, the process of catching up included a “desire to reminisce about the good old days with somebody else; desire to find out if he knew about anybody else,” while Tanya wanted to know if her friend Mary was “ok, and how she was,” after not returning to college and leaving behind no contact information.

Five participants identified the bond of the earlier active friendship as a reason to refriend, as Dan explained:

We connected really good in high school, and I hadn't seen him in a while. I used to hang out with my sister's friends; I never had a friend I could call my own. That's why I consider him my first official friend and that's why I wanted to reconnect back with him. It definitely motivated me to reconnect back with him, get in touch with him some more, because, why not?

For Dan, the decision to reconnect with his old friend was obvious, if not expected, just as it was for Julie when she decided to reach out to her friend David, saying, “There are some connections that we have with people that I really hate to lose . . . and it had been

years since I talked to him and I just said, ‘This is ridiculous.’” John shared a similar view:

If I enjoyed their company as a kid then yeah, why not, you know? I think that if they’re trying to put their way out there to hang back out with you, why would be such a dick to turn them down. Obligated? More like, kind of, I guess, complemented, and you want to return that, and you don’t want to leave them hanging, but definitely some sense of obligation.

Julie elaborated on this sense of obligation:

I think it’s really hard for people to have that opportunity and not take it. Somebody says, ‘Here’s my number, call me sometime.’ I don’t know how it’s easy to say ‘No, not going to do it.’ I would think most of the time they would do it. Kind of forcing people to reconnect with you . . . I felt like that person used to be an important part of my life and I at least owe it to whatever friendship we used to have to at least say, “I haven’t’ abandoned you.

This helps to explain why Karen’s reconnected with her friend Rachel, saying, “She initiated it, and she’s the one who’s kept in going.” Here, the motive to refriend alludes to a sense of obligation that no doubt sparked Karen’s curiosity to reopen and maintain communication with Rachel.

Other participants offered more personal reasons behind their motivation to refriend. For example, a near-death experience forced Roger to reexamine the relational ties in his life:

Back in 2005 I had a major accident, wasn’t supposed to live through it, somehow I did, and it was a life changing accident. I was in the hospital for four and a half

months, took me a year and a half to stand and walk again and all that kind of stuff so my priorities in life changed. I realized the important things were really friends and family. About 2006 I started really trying to find people who had been really true friends to me, not just acquaintances. I got so involved with my job and career and I was so motivated by that at a certain point in my life that I kind of let go of friends.

While Roger's second chance at life filled him with a desire to express apperception and reestablish relational ties, Kim's motivation to refriend served to "test" the other's commitment to the relationship: "I guess I just wanted to test the friendship's worth and step back and say to myself 'Well, you know, if this person contacts me then they really want to be my friend, and if they don't, then they don't.'" Even though the participants in this study reported being out touch with their friends for extended periods of time, ($m = 14.7$ years) there still remained a lingering commitment to the friendship worth reclaiming.

While an underpinning curiosity may feed one's motivation to initiate or respond to a refriending request, it is clear from the above participant responses there are a number of different reasons that spark this curiosity. Yet, as respondents discussed their motivation to refriend, they also talked about the factors that played into their decision not to refriend, as the next research question reveals.

RQ2: What factors would deter or prevent a possible reconnection with a past friend? Like the motivations to refriend, participants talked about some of the reasons for choosing not to reconnect with a particular friend. Table 4 lists these deterrents in descending order according to the number of responses, and also provides a participant

quote as an example of this motive. As shown in Table 4, five (33%) participants mentioned weak relational ties as a deterring factor in reFriending. For example, Roger admitted to avoiding reconnecting with certain individuals because, “Usually, they were people that considered me to be a really good friend and I always kind of considered them to be an acquaintance.” Lisa expressed the same reason: “It would more or less be that I wasn’t really super involved with them to begin with.” For Michelle, however,

Table 4

Refriending Deterrents

Deterrent	# of Participants	Example
Weak Relational Tie	5	“Usually, they were people that considered me to be a really good friend and I always kind of considered them to be an acquaintance.”
No Common Ground	4	“If somebody says, ‘Hey, would love to reconnect with you at the Nickleback show,’ we’re done.”
Past Conflict	4	“Another reason would be because of something that might have happened that made me disconnect . . . Like a conflict.”

reconnecting with a one-time close friend still caused hesitation: “If I haven’t seen somebody in a long time, I don’t just pick up where I left off easily. It’s kind of like I

have to get to know them again.” Here, the desire to refriend is overshadowed by the effort that goes into refriending.

Four (27%) participants identified different interests or having no common ground as a deterrent to wanting to refriend. Thomas identified some of the “red flags” that signaled dissimilar interests that would deter him from refriending:

I think some of the social aspects I would discount absolutely some of those people based on their preferences for television programming, movies – music is a big one for me since I play music and I hope to make my living off of it at some point in the future. If somebody says, “Hey, would love to reconnect with you at the Nickleback show,” we’re done. Not only would I not interact with you, I would probably defriend you. If I find that you watch *Toddlers and Tiaras*, for example, or were really intrigued by that television program, I’d probably go, “Yeah, you and I probably don’t have a lot in common.”

Similarly, Tracy revealed her hesitation to refriend:

Like I don’t know that we have anything to talk about anymore, I don’t know if I can support what you’re doing with your life. I don’t know if we have anything in common. At the heart of quality friendships you have to have a certain mindset that’s the same, and that prevents me a lot of the time from wanting to connect with people because I don’t know that we’re on the same page, whether its in life or what we’re doing, it makes me nervous to engage in that kind of interaction.

Even the manner in which an individual communicated online influenced the possibility of a reconnection, as Thomas explained:

These people that have contacted me from my high school, you know, when somebody types, ‘Hey it’s great to hear from you, blah, blah, blah,’ and there’s 14 run on sentences, and there are some things that just are kind of a red flag to me, and I kind of go, yep, still an idiot, or no, proceed to go.

In the same vein, two participants talked about the maturity level of the friend as an aspect of having no common ground that played a part in whether or not to pursue refriending with a particular individual. As Kim explained:

I guess it would probably depend on maturity level for me. It would definitely depend on their status in life and where they are. I definitely want to surround myself with people, especially at this point in my life, with people that are ambitious, people that have goals and that are working towards their goals.

Four (26%) participants also mentioned conflict left over from the earlier friendship played a role in avoiding a reconnection, as Tanya explained:

People from high school, and even people from college who I may have been cool with but things may have gone sour or I felt like they did me wrong or something happened that wasn’t good. They’ll @ me on Twitter, or “follow me” and I won’t follow back.

Similarly, Ethan considered reuniting with a friend he “never really trusted.” He added, “If he contacted me my first thought would be, what does he want? And am I willing to pay that cost to resolve my curiosity? Or on the other hand, has he changed?” For these participants, past disagreements or questionable character issues inhibited refriending. Still, when asked if there was anything that would deter her from reconnecting with a friend, Karen said, “No. I think if they went through the trouble to find me I’d like to talk

to them.” For Karen, the opportunity for friendship outweighs any hesitation not to refriend.

Participants discussed different reasons that inhibited their motivation to refriend. While Facebook made it easier for individuals to locate and connect with friends, it also allowed them to make judgments based on what they see and read on a person’s profile page that ultimately determined their decision not to refriend. For others, a perceived low level of relational closeness and past conflict inhibited their motivation to refriend.

RQ3: How is the process of refriending communicatively accomplished? In order to explore the process of refriending, participants were asked to talk about how reconnecting with their friend unfolded. Responses reflect the recalled interactions surrounding the initial contact between friends, as well as the conversational topics that grew out of these interactions after years of little to no communication, separated here into two categories of *first contact*, and *conversation topics*. Table 5 shows the communication channel participants reported using to make first contact with their friend. While over half (60%) of the participants turned to Facebook to initiate or respond to a refriending request, the remaining 40% used other methods to make first contact with their refriending partner. Additionally, Table 6 shows the number of participants (40%) who were on the receiving end of their friend’s efforts to reconnect and those (33%) who initiated the refriending process. Simultaneous refers to an initial face-to-face refriending interaction shared between both individuals while two other participants could not recall who contacted who first, designated here as unknown.

First Contact. In terms of the making first contact, five (33%) participants reported that they took the initiative to seek out and contact their friend, with three of

these active initiations occurring through Facebook. For example, Thomas talked about his efforts to reconnect with Chris:

Table 5

Communication Channels Used For Initial Refriending Contact

Channel of Communication	# of Participants
Facebook	9
Email	2
Face-to-face	2
Postal service	1
Phone call	1

Table 6

Participant Role In Initial Refriending Contact

Participant Action	# of Participants
Received Refriending Request	6
Initiated Refriending	6
Simultaneous (i.e. face-to-face)	2
Unknown	2

I had reconnected with some other friends from that same town, and Facebook, in all its infinite wisdom, says, ‘You should contact so and so. You might know this person.’ All of the sudden it kind of hit me, jeez, why haven’t I added Chris back

into my circle of friends, I guess, or my friends list? So I shot him a message and he responded. Then I remember going to his page and saying, ‘Wow, man, it’s good to reconnect with you. It’s probably been a solid 20 plus years. Let’s hook up sometime” and he kind of said, ‘Wow, has it really been that long? Yeah I suppose it has. Let’s do that.’

Julie also used Facebook to contact her friend, saying, “I sent him a Facebook message and said, ‘Hey! Saw your dad; saw your brother. Heard you were moving. Call me,’ something like that. So he did, and that kind of started the whole process.” In these examples, Facebook not only provided the means for making first contact, but in Thomas’ case, Facebook prompted him to reconnect with his friend Chris.

In Tanya’s case, however, Facebook was not an option. After several unsuccessful attempts to locate her friend Mary online, she made one final attempt to make contact by going offline. As she explained:

[I] ended up going through a box that I had of old stuff, old cards, papers, documents, and I found a card that she sent to me, but it didn’t have her name on it, and this was a couple of years ago since she had sent it, but it had an address . . . So I got a little stationary card, and said, ‘My name is such and such, and I’m from such and such, and I’m looking for this person. If you know where she, you know give her my information, and have her get in touch with me.’ About a week later I got an email from an unmarked email account and when I opened the email it said ‘Got your message,’ and I knew it was her. I was like, Wow! And we’ve been in touch through emails.

For this reconnected friendship, Facebook would not be the preferred channel of communication: “I’ll email her because she still doesn’t have a Facebook,” Tanya said. “She’s Twitter-less, no LinkedIn, no other kind of account. Unless you go straight to her house nobody but me can get in touch with her.” She added, “I still don’t know why we haven’t exchanged phone numbers, but just like the old times, if I email her at 4:00 in the morning, at 4:01 I have a reply.” As with other refriending experiences, friends learned to adapt to each other’s preferred method of communication.

In another example, Carol left a phone message with Claire after she “Googled” her maiden name to locate her phone number. When they spoke on the phone for the first time in 30 years, Carol remembered, “Of course there were tears, and then after the tears were over with it was, ‘O.K., how many husbands is this now?’ We just went right back into that, ‘How’s your Mom? How are your brothers?’” Following their reconnection, they tracked down their other close friend, Judy who, unbeknownst to any of them, was living only 10 miles from Claire. Several days later, Judy and Claire picked up Carol from the airport for their reunion. As Carol recalled:

I shed a few tears, and Judy said, ‘You stupid bitch, stop crying,’ and I said, ‘C’mon Judy, I hadn’t seen you.’ She said, ‘Quit crying.’ Judy is the boss. We don’t argue with Judy. She said, ‘Quit crying,’ and I called her a couple of words, and we got in the car and went straight to Judy’s house.

Even though 30 years had passed since they were all together, the bond of friendship remained intact, allowing them to make fun of each other through the tears.

While these examples reveal the active process of seeking out and contacting friends, six (40%) participants were passive participants in that they did not seek out their

friend, but did respond to their refriending request, with four of these interactions occurring through Facebook. For example, Karen said, “Came through Facebook and she just said, ‘Is the Karen I knew at State as a lab partner?’ and I said, ‘Yes, oh my goodness, Rachel! Where are you? What’re doing?’” Ethan also received a similar message from his friend: “And then one day he popped up on Facebook. He said, ‘Is this Ethan?’ and I said, ‘Is this Kenneth?’” Tracy, however, said, “I don’t do Facebook,” and received her refriending request through email. “I got an email at work, kind of saying, ‘Is this the Tracy that I knew in Nevada?’ and basically the rest of the day we exchanged emails back and forth.” She went on to say that since she and her friend David reconnected 10 years ago, email has remained their channel of communication without a single phone call exchanged between them.

Allison also received an email from Lucy, and later they caught up over the phone: “Yes, there were apologies of ‘I’m sorry I haven’t’ been keeping in touch much,’ and such,” Allison remembered. She also talked about a familiar routine that unfolded during their first interaction:

It usually is the salutation, you know, ‘Hey girl!’ because you know not everyone talks to me like that on the telephone. And I go, ‘Oh my God!’ and it’s this funny back and forth banter that we have. She says, ‘Hey girl how are you?’ and I go, ‘Lucy, how’s it going?’ and she’s like, ‘I’m doing fine!’ . . . It’s just something that we laugh about because it’s something that reminds about our college days when I was living catty-corner from her, and I could literally go, ‘Lucy, I need for you to come over here!’ and she’d go, ‘I’ll be right there!’

For these two friends, past interaction routines help them reestablish their ties to one another in the present.

Not all refriending transpired across distances. Two participants reconnected unexpectedly through a face-to-face encounter, as John remembered, “We didn’t really reconnect until we ended up going to University together, and we ended up in the same dorm, and I didn’t know that.” Dan also made first contact with his friend Matt in person:

When I bumped into him, I was like ‘Matt!’ and he was like, ‘Dan!’ We caught up, you know, ‘Man, it’s good seeing you,’ but I could see he was with his girlfriend, you know. I was busy, too. I was happy to see him, but you know, we understood, you know, you’re only here for a certain amount of time and you got to tend to her, whatever she needs help with, and I was trying to take care of something. But we traded numbers.

Dan and Matt would later reconnect over the phone after three years of no contact.

Conversation topics. As revealed in the above category of *interaction routines*, participants reported a number of topic areas emerged during their initial interaction. Some participants used terms such as “very recap,” “face value,” and “[non] superfluous,” to describe these conversations, as exemplified by Karen who said, “We started out with the past, and then we said, ‘This is where I’m at right now, and this is what I’m doing.’” Others reported they were “personal,” and “very open, very honest,” much like Ethan remembered his first phone conversation with Kenneth after the two located each other through Facebook:

He drunk called me one night. It was probably a week after we reconnected. We chatted for probably two hours. We talked about a little of everything. Of course

we had to talk about the past, and we had to talk about who we knew in the past, and what was happening to the people that we knew, catch each other up on the scuttlebutt from everybody else. And then we had, what's going on in your life, what's going on in mine. I told him I was disabled and [the military] medically retired me, and of course he was, 'Oh I'm sorry to hear about that, da da da da, tell me more about it.' And I said, 'What's going on with you?' and he said, 'Well, I'm going through a nasty divorce, and I got two girls, and I said, 'Oh, sorry to hear that,' and he said 'That's my own fault, I did it to myself.'

In another example, when childhood friends John and Derrick discovered they lived in the same college dorm, they were able to catch up with each other face-to-face, but on somewhat of a limited basis, as John explained:

We talked about old times. Most of our conversation, when we weren't out drinking or doing stupid stuff, we'd sit on the front porch and discuss the cool things that happened freshman year; what last week consisted of, how fun it was. It didn't really go into, like, more conversation than talking about what happened to us. I wouldn't say it was superficial, but I would say it didn't go deeper than, 'Oh I had so much fun drinking at the party last night...' Like, that's about as far as the conversation got.

"We didn't connect the way we did," John admitted, and thought it "weird" when Derrick transferred to another school without telling him.

Participants also talked about avoiding certain topics of conversation. Two participants noted that the topic of going to college was a concern when talking to their friends, as exemplified by Eddie, who said, "A lot of them didn't go to college, you can't

talk about that. They kind of regret it and they kind of hold it against you if you did go.”

Lisa made sure to initially “steer clear” of talking about her friend’s father who was suffering a serious illness, and Tanya and Mary preferred to talk about “good stuff” rather than “reflect on bad times much.” In the process of avoiding certain topics, participants also reported they struggled with finding something to talk about at all, as Karen revealed, “And what’s interesting in the refriending process I found is that a lot of times you get that initial, ‘Oh wow!’ and then, you’re like, you don’t know what to say because you don’t have any common ground anymore.” Even though many of her conversations with Rachel remained “superficial” Karen did say, “We had a really nice visit on Skype, and I think if we did that very often we would be more open.” For Karen, moving from superficial to more intimate conversational topics with her friend meant engaging in more face-to-face interactions.

While much of the refriending conversations revolved around what two participants talked about as a “relearning” process, they also revealed their talks served to reaffirm the bond of friendship by simply inhabiting their role as a reliable, cherished friend. For example, Dan recalled being there for his friend Matt:

We talked about stuff. Encouraging me about school, and I was encouraging, too.

He was really having conflicts and issues with his girlfriend, they were going through stuff and he was telling me about what they go through. I was confiding in him, trying to give him positive information, you know, help him out. It was personal.

Allison shared a similar experience with her friend Lucy:

We have a tendency to compliment one another and when we recognize something about them that we find extraordinary that's not within ourselves and we compliment constantly about that type of thing. Under normal circumstances you don't get that from an acquaintance or you wouldn't get that from a classmate or coworker. It's much more intimate in that sense. That's was something we were doing constantly back and forth and it was almost like we were playing catch up with that.

Here again, past relational routines served to reinforce the bond of friendship in the present.

Interestingly, five participants were able to recall when they felt like they had fully reconnected with their old friend. For instance, Michelle said:

We went and ate at a Mexican restaurant one day, and I was dating this guy and I would tell her things about our relationship, and it just felt like old times, you know, because in high school we both had boyfriends, you know, talked about stuff like that.

Natalie felt like her friend David was “back from the beginning” from “that very first day that he sent the email saying, ‘Are you the Tracy I might have known in Nevada?’ the rest of the day, back and forth. I mean we didn't get hardly any work done.” Thomas also recognized he had made a genuine reconnection with his friend Chris after one particular encouraging message:

Probably when he went out of the way to send me a direct message to say, ‘Hey, really like to make it to your show this weekend. Just didn't work out, but keep sending me invites and I'll know I'll make it to one of these.’ That was probably

for me one of the tell-tell signs where I went, okay, yeah, he's obviously very interested, it's very legitimate, it's not superficial, and I really does hope he makes it to one of them.

For Julie, the moment she felt like she had fully reconnected with her friend Trevor became apparent during a desperate, early-morning phone conversation:

This had to be maybe two or three months after that initial conversation happened. His mom had gone back into the hospital and it was not a good outlook. It was 4:00 in the morning for me so it would have 2:00 in the morning for him, and he called and I literally answered the phone and I said 'Hello?' and he cried for a bout 15 minutes and then just started talking. I didn't say a word. I literally just sat there with the phone, and it was ranging from that kind of sadness to complete rage at some points, and then it all came back and he said 'You're the only person that can just listen.' That was kind of, you know, the nature of our friendship initially; that we could vent to each other and it would be ok because we understood, first, I'm not angry at you. We could understand the context of whatever the other was talking about, [from] when we were younger. In the end it was kind of ok. It was just somebody who was going to listen to you and be able to understand, and they didn't have to tell you what to do, or give you advice, it was, you know, I just need a friend, and that was the defining moment.

The mutual trust and caring that defined their earlier friendship allowed Julie and Trevor to lean on one other even after years of being out of touch. Similarly, Roger identified a particular scene he felt enacted his reconnection to Joel that transpired when the two, along with Joel's girlfriend, met for dinner. As he recalled:

I would say when we got to the dessert part of the menu. They started bringing up, “Well, how’d you find Roger? What made you want to?” type of thing and that’s when I told them about the accident that I had and how important it was, and as soon as that happened, they were both just like, oh, this is important, and they agreed, they were like, yeah we do, we get totally side-tracked in all these things that aren’t important in life and we stress about all these things but it’s really friends and family. It was kind of funny because after that he called the waiter over, gave him the camera, we all took pictures together, and then when we all went out after that too, it was the chummy, you know, us joking around again because he’s a practical joker.

In sum, the overall process of refriending served to reacquaint one-time close friends in the present. Participants, as either active or passive agents when making first contact, communicatively accomplished refriending through processes of information seeking, self-disclosure, and reciprocal caring. Typically, refriending was not a single event, but a series of interactions that helped refashion the bond of the earlier friendship and secure their connection to one another in the present. Moreover, some participants recalled certain moments transpired that defined their refriending as legitimate.

RQ4: Why do some reconnections last and others do not? Participants were asked to talk about what they felt contributed to an enduring friendship reconnection. Eight participants (53%) reported they were still actively engaged with their refriending partner corresponding at least once a month via phone, email, Facebook, or some combination of the three, while six (40%) participants indicated they had not interacted with their friend for over a month. Kim, who maintains regular contact with her friend Maria after they

refriended while attending the same college, said “motivation is the number one factor,” in maintaining a friendship reconnection; “how bad you want the friendship to last, and how often you make the effort to communicate with the other person, and keep in touch with the other person.”

Allison, who interacts with her friend Lucy at least once a month, offered a number of different reasons for their successful reconnection:

I believe it’s about foundation, and communication, and respect. Being non-judgmental about relationships is always a good thing. Over the years, one of the life lessons that I learned is that not everybody thinks like I do, and it’s a good thing. My relationships would be quite boring, in my opinion, if they were all thinking like I did.

Lisa also shared some of the above reasons as to why her friendship with Sarah has endured, saying:

I think it’s just because of what we had before; even though it was minimal, like, minimally stayed connected, we did try. The sense of family . . . and we understand each other. There are so many things that are different about us, but it makes it fun.

For these friendships, motivation, frequency of contact, the foundational bond of the earlier active friendship, and difference all help to sustain their connection to one another. While Kim identified motivation and frequency of contact as key aspects to her enduring friendship reconnection, Allison mentioned the friendship’s foundation of communication, respect, and difference the help maintain their connection to one another.

In another example, Tracy, who emails her friend David “at least once a week” alluded to the timing of their reconnection as a positive factor in their successful refriending experience:

It might have been where we were in our own lives when we reunited. We were settled to an extent in our careers, and we’re in our forties, mature enough to have a male/female relationship that was friendship without any sexual tension or anything like that. So I think it has to do with when we reunited.

She went on to say they share the “good stuff” going on in their lives as well as “the bad stuff” suggesting a pattern of reciprocal caring helping to sustain their active friendship.

Tanya, however, said her friendship with Mary has remained active “because we disconnected physically, not spiritually. You can’t control that. I know it’s all divine.”

She added:

It wasn’t a bad situation that we disconnected. So it was kind of like ‘Oh, ok, yeah, let’s pick it back up and keep it moving because we still have a lot of learning to do, a lot of growing to do.’

For Tanya and Mary, the potential for a stronger, more in depth friendship keeps them in contact with one another at least “once, twice a week.” Carol, who saw her two friends “two years ago,” said, “It’s not like it’s an everyday phone call. We can go weeks, we can go months” without interacting. Even though she has intermittent contact with her two friends, she identified “a genuine love” as the reason keeps them connected to one another. “I love those two women with all my heart. I’m closer to Pam and Anita than I am to my siblings,” she added.

In the opposite direction, Roger talked about why he felt some friendship reconnections do not last. As he explained:

I think it just kind of has to do with where people are in life and where their priorities are. You know, sometimes people are trying just to reunite, I think, to grasp on to something that was there in the past, but that's why they maybe had drifted away in the first place because things changed. I think sometimes people are trying to live in the past and trying to grab onto those things in the past, and if there's nothing in the future or present that still keeps them connected then I think the friendships drift away. I think that happens more with acquaintances, you know, people that they think are friends, but they're really not.

While Roger spoke in general terms about why he felt refriending does not always lead to an ongoing relationship, Julie elaborated on the “lull” in her reconnection with David:

After seeing him at his mother's funeral, we were still in touch, but shortly after that he finished school and moved back to New York. After that, things became more distant. My assumption is that he just got back to a comfortable place, around people and situations he knew. When he was out in California, he didn't know anybody or have anybody; I was the only person he talked to, especially about what was going on in his family. I'm guessing that when he moved back to New York, he needed me less as a crutch, so to speak.

Although this does not signal an end to their relationship, it does provide an account as to why some reconnections, and friendships in general, succumb to the changing needs and priorities that can hinder, or sometimes terminate, a friendship. In this direction, John offered an explanation for why reconnections sometimes come up short: “Personality

changes, interest changes. I don't think there's much more that would dictate why you would stay friends or not." After several occasions of catching up with his friend Derrick, John said, "You could recognize, and I think he could recognize too, that it was a little bit different, and at that point sometimes we'd just run out of stuff to say." Eventually, John and Derrick lost touch with each other and entered another period of relational dormancy.

In sum, participants indicated a number of different reasons why some friendship reconnections last and others do not. For many, leaning on the familiarity of the past friendship helped to advance their refriending experience forward propelled by the established bond of the earlier relationship. Still, those familiar aspects of personality and shared interests often changed during the period of relational dormancy, and served to limit the friendship reconnection.

RQ5: What dialectical tensions are in play during the refriending process? As discussed in the above review of literature, dialectical tensions are revealed through textual analysis in search of competing discourses that reflect multiple meanings within a particular conversation. These contradictory meanings emerge in the talk shared between interlocutors as well as from a person's individual utterance. The multiple meanings emanating from an individual's use of language apply directly to the current study of participant responses about their refriending experience(s). An analysis of the interview data revealed a number of dialectical tensions identified by Rawlins (1989, 1992) as especially applicable to friendships, including: *the dialectic of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent, the dialectic of affection and instrumentality, the dialectic of judgment and acceptance, and the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness.*

The dialectic of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent.

As previously discussed, friends experiencing this dialectical tension struggle to manage the priorities and freedoms of their individuality with their role expectations as a reliable friend. In refriending, this tension emerged when friends experienced a change in their roles from the earlier friendship. For example, when Allison traveled to visit her friend Lucy shortly after they reconnected, she “wanted all of [Lucy] to myself and not share her with her family or her husband . . . because inside I was thinking . . . I came all this way, I deserve to take up all of her time.” Allison’s need for her friend’s time and attention competed with Lucy’s new responsibilities as a wife and mother. She went on: “But then the realization is that her husband is there, he is a priority, her son is there, he is a priority, and I have to step back and realize that I am the third wheel in the picture.” Here, Allison’s desire for the mutual dependence that helped to establish and nurture the earlier active friendship conflicted with Lucy’s priorities independent of their friendship ties. Similarly, another participant talked about the anxiety associated with being there for a friend when competing priorities or perspectives get in the way. “Sometimes people become more dependent on you than you expect them to,” Julie said. “Sometimes it ends in conflict because you really are butting heads, because your personalities or views on life are completely different.” The tension between Allison and Lucy emerged from each friend attempting to respond to both the need for dependence desired by one friend, and the need to answer to priorities independent of the friendship by the other friend. However, it was the strength of their enduring friendship that helped them identify and talk about this tension: “I was kind of stifling under my breath, ‘Man, why can’t we have the time together?’” Allison recalled. “And you know, she was like, ‘We need to talk

about this,’ and when we did I understood. I was like, I don’t like it, but yes, I understand.” For these two friends, the reliable alliance forged years earlier allowed them to make sense of their relationship as reconnected individuals in the present.

The dialectic of affection and instrumentality. Here, the dialectical tension centers on the behavioral interplay of friends maintaining and expressing true affection for one another, and using friends for one’s own benefit. In process of refriending, these competing discourses revolved around the motive(s) to reconnect and the perception of these motives. For example, Ethan talked about his unsuccessful attempt to reconnect with his friend George. As he recalled:

[Kenneth} told me that George was diagnosed with liver cancer, or liver something, and he was going to need a liver transplant or he was going to die. And so he gave me George’s number and I called George up. George didn’t answer the phone. I left a voicemail, and a couple of days later I called again, and George answered the phone, and he just didn’t want to talk.

Ethan’s motive to reconnect with George was to show support and affection for his friend who was battling a serious health issue, but when he finally spoke with him, George was aloof and showed little interest in rekindling the friendship. Thinking back on this brief interaction, Ethan speculated on his friend’s reticence to refriend:

I don’t know if it was, I’ll be damned if I want to talk to you now because you didn’t talk to me when I was alive, or feeling sorry for himself, or what his feelings or thoughts were, but he didn’t want to reconnect . . . There’s a lot of people after they pass away it’s like, if you don’t come see me when I’m alive,

don't come to my funeral. If I wasn't good enough then, then I'm not good enough now.

This statement suggests that the lack of interaction over the years created a relational void in their friendship, and the bond they once shared no longer existed. This statement also suggests that George might have considered Ethan's attempt to reconnect long overdue, and saw it as a self-serving attempt to dilute any guilt for not considering their friendship "good enough" to maintain. In this direction, another participant talked about the guilt associated with making up for lost time. As Dan said:

Maybe this old friend of yours realized he hadn't talked to you in a long while and he wants to reconnect with you. He realized he was so busy with other stuff. Maybe he feels overwhelming guilt. Or maybe he just wants to see how you're doing, you know, just a general concern, caring.

The word "or" that appears in this quote suggests that refriending can serve two purposes. First, it may help to relieve one of the guilt for placing more importance on the "other stuff" in life over his or her own efforts to keep in touch with an old friend. Second, refriending can also serve to express one's affection for the other. From a dialectical perspective, refriending can serve to both relieve this guilt and show affection. The dialectical tension emerges when one friend's intention to express fondness is perceived by the other friend as an ulterior motive driven by selfish means to reduce their own anxiety over not keeping in touch, as illustrated in Ethan's example above when George rejected his attempt to refriend.

The dialectic of judgment and acceptance. As previously discussed, a benevolent friendship helps to reaffirm self-identity through the endorsement of shared attitudes

while also making apparent the behaviors appropriate between friends. However, friends struggle with knowing how and when to express criticism toward one another when one friend judges the attitudes and behaviors of the other as questionable or unacceptable. This dialectical tension emerged in people's refriending experiences when deciding to pursue a refriending opportunity, as with Julie, who said:

I think a lot of what made me anxious about reconnecting with this particular friend would be what deterred me, as in where our lives have gone, especially if I've just kind of found this person on Facebook, kind of trolling into their lives via their Facebook page, and I do become more judgmental. Like I don't know that we have anything to talk about anymore. I don't know if I can support what you're doing with your life.

Julie's "anxious" feeling transpired from her uncertainty over whether or not to reestablish communication with this particular friend after evaluating the personal information displayed on that individual's Facebook page. The word "trolling," in this case means, "to search in or at" (Trolling, n.d.), and what she found deterred her from wanting to refriend. She continued:

That really seems kind of superficial, but at the heart of, I think, at the heart of quality friendships you have to have a certain mindset that's the same, and that prevents me a lot of the time from wanting to connect with people because I don't know that we're on the same page, whether its in life or what we're doing. It makes me nervous to engage in that kind of interaction.

For Julie, having "a certain mindset that's the same" means sharing similar values and beliefs as friends, in short, accepting the other for who she or he is. Tension mounted as

she contemplated the “kind of interaction” she might have with a friend whose perspectives diverge from her own.

Where apparent differences created negative tension for Julie, disagreement and criticism between Carol and her two close friends helped to reaffirm and sustain the bond of their friendship. As she explained:

There [were] some friends I had that moved and have gone on. Even though they were close when they left, I can see my life without them. But with Judy and Claire, I just can't see my life without these two women that I know that no matter what happens, and we disagree with each other, we do. We disagree with things, and we'll call each other out on it, but it doesn't affect our love or our friendship for one another. There's days I may not like them, but I still love them.

Here, the friendship she shares with Judy and Claire carries a particular privilege of acceptance that perhaps other friendships did not offer. Criticism and disagreement may temporarily cause tension between them, but the totality of their benevolent friendship—the interconnectedness of their individual and collective experiences—fosters forgiveness and acceptance that ultimately serves to reinforce their mutual love for one another (Rawlins, 2009).

The dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness. Here, the dialectical scenario revolves around self-disclosure and trust as friends struggle to manage open and honest communication about themselves and/or the other while also protecting themselves and/or the other from revealing too much information. Consider this quote from Tanya:

There must have been a lot going on that we didn't know about because she just didn't come back. Now, I do want to know. I have a curiosity, but I 'm not a

pushy person so I would rather for her to tell me her own when the time is right because there's a reason she's withholding information. I don't doubt that she would because the fact that she reached back out to me because she didn't have to.

Here, Tanya struggled between wanting to ask her friend Mary why she suddenly disappeared, and letting Mary reveal this information "when the time is right." She admits to having a "curiosity" but she also does not see herself as a "pushy person" that would encroach on other people's privacy. She knows her friend is "withholding" information, but would rather protect her friend from feeling uneasy about revealing such sensitive information. Here, this dialectical tension of expressiveness-protectiveness differs from the dependent-independent dialectic in that the former is more concerned with protecting and respecting the other's face while the latter focuses more on the needs and desires of the self.

In sum, the results from the preceding research questions help to capture some of the broader aspects of the refriending experience while also referencing particular categorical components from the content analysis. Taken together, these methods of inquiry reveal refriending as a dynamic relational process given meaning through the discourse of the friendship itself. The following chapter discusses these processes in more detail.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Friendship has long been contemplated by the voices that shape social scientific research. Even before we began dissecting the attitudes and behaviors associated with this exclusive, yet universal, relationship, philosophers and storytellers considered the bond of friendship a testament to our nature as social beings; one that heightened the consciousness of self and other, and helped to reveal our world to us. The current project set out to explore what happens when past friends emerge from an extended period of communication dormancy to interact with each other once again. It is a study of a particular kind of relational experience that positions individuals as both friend and stranger in their efforts to revisit and, in some cases, reclaim the bond they forged together years earlier.

Before moving into deeper analysis of the results from people's experiences of refriending, it is important to recall here the philosophical tenets guiding this qualitative study. First, exploring refriending from a phenomenological perspective allowed for close examination of participants' language describing their own experience(s) as they remembered and made sense of refriending (Heidegger, 1962). As a reflexive exercise, each participant chose words that best constructed the reality of refriending as a past event made sense through the language emerging in the moment. Doing so positioned the researcher as a native in the world of refriending allowing for close inspection and interpretation of these lived events. The resulting thematic analysis captured both the nuances and common features circulating among refriending episodes constituted through the descriptive language of the participants.

Second, interpreting this particular experience unfolded as a hermeneutical process of understanding through close examination of the subjective meanings garnered from participant interviews, and then assembling these individual meanings to compose a larger picture of the refriending experience (Gadamer, 1975). Rather than simply compiling and presenting data from the interview and research questions, the hermeneutical method allowed for close inspection of responses along with composing a larger picture of the refriending experience. By only reporting participant responses from the interview questions would reveal this project as merely reporting and less a process of discovery. Moving back and forth between interpreting parts of the text to give meaning to the whole reflected the participants' sense-making process as they examined their individual identities in relation to the composite friendship. In this way, hermeneutical thinking offered more than a "path or way to and understanding of the world" (Schrage, 1969, p. 113), "It becomes the fundamental character of existence itself" (Deetz, 1977, p. 61). This method of observation proved most valuable for qualitatively working out meanings between researcher and participant through the dialogic interplay of competing perspectives in the articulation of new meanings. On a few occasions, participants remarked at the discovery of their own understanding, usually at the conclusion of the interview, saying, "Now that I've thought about it," or "I've never really talked about this before." These are the sorts of epiphanies qualitative researchers should strive for in their work.

In the following discussion section, results from the research questions guide further exploration of these unique refriending experiences that include categorical meanings gleaned from the content analysis. The activity of reconnecting with an old

friend presented a number of relational challenges to each of the participants in this study. While reconnecting with a past friend may be a fairly common occurrence across the population, it is often as unique an experience as the friendship itself, determined by the efforts of its two actors. No two refriending episodes unfolded exactly the same, though their accounts often mirrored similar interpersonal processes in their (re) development of friendship. In some cases, a single interactive episode was enough to refashion the bond of a once close friendship, while, in other instances, a series of episodes helped to unearth the intimate ties buried by the passage of time.

As the first two research questions revealed, the significance of the relational history from the earlier active friendship proved a determining factor in one's interest to refriend. Individuals responded more positively and with less hesitation to refriending with a once good or close friend than with someone they shared less intimate ties with. In the case of the former, individuals often did not spend time deciding to refriend, because, as one participant stated, "If I enjoyed their company as a kid then yeah, why not?" Here, the characteristics of the previous friendship were enough of a factor to initiate or respond to a refriending episode and allowed them to "pick up where we left off," a sentiment shared by many of the participants. A shared history provided friends with something to talk about, refer to, and build on. It gave them license to reclaim their allegiance to one another while also revealing new aspects of their unknown self to the other. A shared history between friends simply made it more acceptable to say to the other after an extended period of time, "I know it's been 15 years, but how are you?"

In instances where friends were less familiar with one another, refriending mirrored many of the same characteristics and strategies found in the development of

new friendships, particularly in identifying similarities and establishing common ground (Fehr, 2008). Apart from their own personal knowledge about their friend garnered from the earlier active relationship, participants used other available sources of information, such as the person's Facebook profile, or third party knowledge, to compose a sort of personal dossier about the individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors before making themselves "available" to the other. The motivation to refriend depended greatly on their friend's "status"; that they were ambitious and "working towards their goals." Aspiring to anything less revealed this person to be "stuck" in life, or that that "they still haven't gotten their act together." Participants identified these shortcomings as factors against refriending that mirrored Rodin's (1982) notion of exclusion criteria, a checklist of desired prerequisites necessary for engaging in new relationships. A friend who an individual shared weak relational ties with received more scrutiny over their expected progress in life than did a friend with stronger relational ties. This reaffirms a feature of friendship that people are more forgiving about the shortcomings of their close friends than with other less intimate friends (Rawlins 1992).

When a refriending request did arrive, participants expressed a range of reactions to a friend reaching out from the past. Tanya wondered with skepticism, "Why do you want to friend me now?" while Ethan said he felt "honored" that someone thought enough of him to want to reconnect. For most participants, the decision to refriend was simply a reflex in response to a refriending request. For others, a particular "tipping point" in the decision to reconnect became apparent. Thomas, for example, decided to initiate a refriending request after he received a prompt from Facebook itself:

I had reconnected with some other friends from that same town and Facebook, in all it's infinite wisdom says, 'You should contact so and so. You might know this person.' All of the sudden it kind of hit me: Jeez! Why haven't I added Chris back into my circle of friends, I guess, or my friends list? So I shot him a message and he responded.

Carol initiated a refriending request after an old boyfriend showed up at her mother's funeral and asked about her two best friends from high school, Pam and Anita. This led her to seek out information about the other two, and within days the three friends were reunited.

The desire to answer the call of curiosity—to reduce uncertainty about the status of their friend or the friendship itself—sparked interest in reconnecting, but the motivation to actively pursue refriending was greatly influenced by the bond of the earlier active friendship. When the desire to reduce uncertainty about the person revealed unmet expectations for maturity and personal progress, refriending was either avoided or interaction with the friend was limited.

In the context of revisiting a once close friendship, uncertainty played out not as a negative aspect towards gaining more certainty about their friend, but rather, uncertainty fostered a sense of enthusiasm and anticipation over the potential for renewed friendship and personal gain. Consider this quote from Thomas:

I think about what if you were meant to partner up with them in terms of business or, jeez, you know, what if you were working on a screenplay and you need that cog in the wheel to help you finish it. You just never know where life could take you I guess.

The ‘unknown’ proved an attractive feature in reconnecting past friendships. Through knowing our past friends again comes the possibility for realizing our own potential for commerce and creativity. That such a fortuitous encounter (and for many of the participants, their reconnection was by sheer chance) has the potential to deliver unexpected rewards and offer new ways of seeing the world speaks to the dialogic fusion of horizons where “old and new grow together again” (Gadamer, 1960, p. 289). From the bond of the old friendship there exists the potential to create a new one through discourses emanating from past and present identities. This supports Baxter’s (2011) idea of privileging uncertainty over certainty discussed as both friends struggle together in their efforts to create new discourses of meaning from a cache of shared experiences. Thus, refriending imbues a spirit of “dialogic creativity,” (Baxter, 2011, p. 9) Baxter’s preferred term over uncertainty that captures the quality of surprise (Morson & Emerson, 1990) friends both anticipate and experience as they collaboratively develop new meanings about each other and the friendship. In this way, certainty is seen as monologic, an individual endeavor of reducing the unknown into manageable known information, while uncertainty is an unfinalizable meaning-making process unfolding as dialogic creativity (Baxter, 2011).

The third research question examined the interactional process of refriending where both individuals worked to identify the familiar features that enlivened their earlier friendship. As previously discussed, the majority of participants talked about “catching up” with their friend in the early stages of refriending as a way to re-orient one to the other. This supports Sigman’s (1991) notion that relational partners deploy *retrospective units* that work to sustain the relationship in the present. Information about the other’s

unknown past become retrospective units that help friends learn about each other and also add to the overall composition of the friendship that enables future interactions. Catching up thus serves to bridge the past with the present as friends exchange new information that helps to propel the friendship forward in support of relational continuity.

The process of refriending also mirrored new relationship development. In support of social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), refriending often unfolded in stages as participants moved from less to more self-disclosure, but the breadth and depth of self-disclosure was contingent on the relational bond of the earlier active friendship. Several participants struggled with having enough to talk about because, due to the passage of time, they felt they no longer shared common ground with their friend. Here again, the history of the friendship proved a significant factor in the refriending process as past-shared experiences frequently provided friends with topics of conversations while the bond of the earlier active friendship determined the depth of these conversations.

Participants were careful to steer clear of certain conversational topics as a protective measure. Several participants downplayed their college education or avoided talking about it altogether with a friend who did not attend college, typically to avoid any possible judgment or resentment from their friend, and to also maintain a sense of equality within the friendship, a key ingredient in developing and maintaining the interdependent nature of friendship (Hays, 1988). One participant said she and her friend preferred to talk about “good stuff” and avoid talking about “bad times” even though “we know they exist.” This supports Afifi and Guerrero’s (1998) notion that people are

motivated to avoid certain topics in order to protect their own and/or the other's self image, or to protect the relationship itself.

As previously discussed, the intimate ties that bond friends together rely greatly on the establishment of reciprocal trust, and in the case of refriending, the issue of trust unfolded in different ways. Some wrestled with trusting themselves enough to participate in refriending, unsure of their own and the other's dedication to renewing the friendship. Baxter (1988) identified this as *ambivalence*, a certain hesitation that played into one's decision whether or not to form a new relationship. In refriending, ambivalence translated into a feeling of *indifference*, a concern that their friendship no longer held any importance to the other and that their efforts to reconnect would fall short of expectations, or worse, be ignored altogether. Here, the lack of trust generated a feeling of vulnerability expressed by many participants who felt they risked exposing themselves to judgment or rejection. Transacting refriending through Facebook allowed participants to control the quality and quantity of their interactions with refriending partners, taking "small steps" toward establishing the trust in the redevelopment of friendship, and thus controlling their level of emotional investment in refriending.

Trust also redeveloped from the identification of familiar character traits revealed through the refriending process. After years of silence, the sound of a friend's voice over the phone suddenly rendered the memory of the person real, helping to compose the physical identity of one half of the friendship. Like hearing an old song that sparks a particular memory, a friend's voice worked much the same way but provided the added benefit of reciprocal interaction rather than mere individual reflection. Humor not only helped to relieve tension, but also facilitated shared understanding and trust as friends fell

back into old interactional routines and communication styles built around wit and inside jokes. While the majority of refriending episodes unfolded in non face-to-face contexts, participants often claimed they could “see” their old friend as they once were. In this way, individuals experienced a sense of *presence* as being transported to another place, or claiming shared spaces with other people through a particular medium (e.g. computer, telephone) where the medium is perceived as “invisible or transparent” (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In other words, while refriending episodes typically transpired through the exchange of Facebook messages, emails, and phone calls, the significance of the relational moment created a sense of being in the same room with their friend, enacting the familiar interactional routines exclusive to that friendship while reaffirming their trust in one another.

The fourth research question explored the outcomes of refriending and revealed that the foundation of the past friendship was the key to ongoing reconnected friendships in the present. While a strong foundation for friendship may require shared similarities and common ground, the way friends handle perceived changes in their friend or the friendship played directly into the trajectory of the reconnected relationship. Bateson (1972) stated that “Difference which occurs across time is what we call ‘change’” (p. 452). As already noted, a perceived lack of change contributed to participants avoiding refriending with individuals they deemed less than a good, close, or best friend, reinforcing the importance of the relational bond shaped by a shared history of experiences. In refriending episodes between individuals who shared more intimate ties, perceived changes over time were not seen as a detriment to the foundation of the

friendship but functioned to serve the continuity of the relationship through the working out of new relational systems of meaning.

As previously shown, Allison and Lucy struggled early on in their reconnected friendship due to Lucy's new role as a mother that took time and attention away from her expected role as Allison's friend. Even though these two friends shared a longer history together than did Lucy and her husband, the old systems of meaning from the earlier relationship were redefined in the talk of the reconnected friendship and served to strengthen their bond to one another. "Time has not changed our sisterly bond," Allison said. "We both have an understanding that life happens, and we are fully in agreement that it does not change how we feel about one another." This echoes as a prevailing sentiment expressed by participants reconnecting as one-time close friends from the past who see their bond of friendship as impervious to the impinging forces of everyday life. Friends of this type are "way above" other friends; a person "I trust my family's life with." Even in their absence these particular friends inhabit a spirit-like presence that suggests they are "always there" when needed. This supports Baxter's (2011) idea that relational discontinuity (i.e. extended periods of non-interaction) does not work against the relationship but instead provides moments of creative discourse where friends actively assimilate old relational meanings with new ones while endearing themselves to the other once again.

The final research question confirmed the dialectical implications associated with friendship identified by Rawlins (1989, 1992) as interactional dialectics. These and other dialectical tensions present in the context of re-friending are primarily positioned at the discursive site of the proximal already-spoken link in Baxter and Montgomery's (1996,

2011) utterance chain previously discussed in Chapter II. Here, discursive struggle revolves around the identity of the relationship as friends assimilate new relational meanings into a shared history of past relational meanings in an effort to move the friendship to a new level. For example, old and new identities brush up against one another in the following utterance chain:

Whenever I'm speaking about myself I feel like I've always just kind of been like the more serious kind of studious one, and she's always been like the happy-go-lucky type; the glass half full. I definitely think she's changed to where she's a lot more serious and a lot more focused, and I still feel like the happy-go-lucky person is there but it just doesn't really show through as much anymore.

In this statement, two competing discourses are in play to account for a "change" in a friend. First, Kim invoked a discourse of stability as she identified her past friendship with Maria as two friends on opposite ends of a personality spectrum: herself as "serious" and "studious," while labeling her friend as "the happy-go-lucky type." This described the way she saw each of their individual past identities that had "always been" in their friendship. A second discourse of difference revealed that Kim now sees Maria as changed from the "happy-go-lucky type" to a "more serious and a lot more focused" person. Kim seems to express partiality for Maria's old identity that "just doesn't really show through as much anymore." As Kim accounted for the change in her friend, she engaged in what Baxter (2011) called *identity work* where individuals construct the identity of the relationship "in order render it intelligible" (p. 155). Doing so revealed the *dialectic of stability-change* as Kim struggled to identify with her friend's prevailing new personality while longing for the enduring, dependable qualities of the old one.

In another example, cross-sexed friends revealed the *dialectic of past-present* during their first interactions with each other. As Tracy recalled:

It was a very recap, you know, “I’m married, I’ve got two kids,” kind of thing. But it was also a little bit of pining, I guess, that talking about that he was very special to me and vice-versa, and a big important part of my life at that time, and sort of an appreciation of that, statement of appreciation of that, [from] both of us. And a tiny little bit of flirty-fun kind of thing but not in anyway creepy or anything like that. I think he even said something along the lines of ‘Once in a while, I think about what if,’ but quickly followed that up with ‘I’ve got this fabulous wife and great kids...’

Several competing discourses comprise this statement of identity work. One addresses the present as both friends “recap” their lives to one another while revealing they are both married. Another discourse captured the past as both friends expressed a “statement of appreciation” for the other, jointly commemorating their friendship as a once significant part of their lives. The “flirty-fun” talk suggested a third discourse of romantic possibilities unfolding in cross-sexed friendships. This kind of talk was not considered “creepy” in the context of their friendship because both felt safe in their respective marriages. Their roles as a spouse, mother and father, and friend collide in competing discourses that enliven both their past and the present lives.

In another example, the participant’s own words are used to label a dialectical tension indigenous (Conville, 1998) to the refriending experience. Consider this quote from Julie:

It's strange because we still knew each other very much after all this time, and so I would say, or he would say, 'You're holding something back,' or 'What do you really want to say?' or 'I know there's something you're thinking. What's the problem?' And it was just difficult to get passed those barriers that despite how good of friends we were in the beginning or even how far our friendship developed after a few months it was still those barriers that, you're still a stranger to me at some level, and I'm not gonna let you into whatever I'm thinking or whatever is potentially vulnerable, or whatever it was that to this day that still causes a lot conflict."

The struggle between Julie and Trevor revealed the tension between friend and stranger. On one hand, this statement suggests they are working from a discourse of friendship developed out of mutual interdependence and trust from the earlier active friendship. As friends who share a past history, they bring with them to the present relationship prior knowledge and understanding about the other. Competing against this discourse of *friend* is a discourse of *stranger*. Here, talk of "barriers" indicates the presence of a "stranger" as well as a need for protection against possible negative appraisal of "whatever I'm thinking." Because they "still knew each other very much," both friends sensed the other "thinking something" and "holding back" information but "still" remained a stranger to one another "at some level" because of their refusal to "let [the other] into" another more revealing level of friendship. As strangers, both are suspicious of the other's thoughts and intentions, but as friends both are aware of the other's suspicions about the other. In this way, the dance between both friend and stranger is an ongoing discursive struggle initiated by their re-friending.

Beyond the scope of the research questions, participants revealed other aspects of the refriending experience. For example, technology served to initiate and maintain the majority of these refriending experiences, but as previously revealed, people's application of and attitudes about these technologies varied. While Facebook did play a large role in many refriending episodes, participants often referred to it as way to distinguish among types of friendships. One particular quote reflected the thoughts of many participants when referring to Facebook: "We can be Facebook friends but we're not hanging out." Participants were keenly aware that people use Facebook to collect friends in order to create a favorable social impression. This supports Kleck, Reese, Behnken, and Sundar's (2007) findings that people who have large numbers of Facebook friends are perceived as more popular, confident, and attractive than those with a lower number of Facebook friends. However, in the context of refriending, the reconnected friendship did not exist as a result of Facebook, but in some ways, in spite of it. In the above quote, designating one as a Facebook friend suggests a purely online relationship where certain rules and behaviors apply within the parameters of an online social network. Friends designated for refriending, however, are not products of Facebook, but reside as an intrinsic component of the other's identity serviced by the convenience that this technology affords.

In another direction, participants were asked to provide suggestions to those considering reconnecting with a friend. Responses varied from "Follow your heart," to "Be careful and make sure you want to rekindle a relationship." One participant said, "Absolutely go out on a limb and reconnect with that person," while another pointed out, "You have to keep in mind that this person may not want to reconnect for whatever reason." Taken as a whole, participants advised caution, and to rely mostly on one's

intuition to gauge one's own and the other's commitment and interest in reconnecting. Participants associated the rejection of a refriending attempt, threats to vulnerability, and unequal commitment to the reconnected friendship as risks of refriending, but as previously discussed, and emphasized by one participant, "the rewards are wonderful and it's worth the risk," a particular sentiment the majority of participants did attest to.

When taken together, the results from the content analysis and research questions reveal refriending as an identity-shaping discursive struggle between the past and the present; the old and the new; the unfamiliar and the familiar. Patterns emerged across refriending accounts as participants shared similar discursive experiences of catching up and reminiscing about the past while also identifying old and new physical and behavioral attributes about their friends. However, a pattern of interest in the refriending experience recalls a sentiment shared among the majority of participants to expect the unexpected. Even though refriending episodes shared similar relational processes, the breadth and depth of these processes varied greatly within and among refriending experiences. Friends often discovered each other as both the same person in particular ways and vastly different in other ways. Reconciling these discoveries proved challenging, if not revealing and rewarding.

Overall, a shared history is the most important component to an ongoing friendship. In refriending, we seek out those significant others whose friendship helped shape our identity in hopes of discovering how those efforts translated to other aspects of their lives while exploring how they influenced our own. Refriending dusts off past socio-emotional affective ties born out of shared experiences and brings them into the present for reflexive evaluation. It allows us to observe our accomplishments and

struggles in comparison to those of our friends. Some reconnect purely for nostalgic purposes as a momentary stroll down memory lane while others reconnect to find a “missing part” of themselves so they feel “whole, complete.” For several of the participants in this study, knowing that these particular intimate friends exist, even in their absence, provides proof of some kind of spiritual connection and validates meaning in their own lives. In any event, refriending reveals as much about our selves as it does about our friends.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study explored people’s experiences of reconnecting with an old friend, certain limitations are acknowledged. First, all of the participant accounts of refriending were collected from only one half of the friendship dyad. Some of the participants spoke on behalf of the absent other offering what they thought their friend would say in certain situations. While this did provide valuable data, future research should seek responses from both refriending partners to compare and contrast perspectives between the two friends. This would especially benefit exploration of the dialectical tensions revealed as discursive struggles in the talk between friends as they jointly make sense of their refriending experience. Here, research could also elaborate more on the competing discourses representing other links in Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) utterance chain. For example, while the proximal already-spoken link applies directly to the discursive struggles of refriending where past relationship systems of meaning contend with new ones, the distal already-spoken link identifies the cultural systems of meanings at large that might also inform the discursive struggles found in refriending. American culture celebrates the idea of reunion, particularly in pop culture

references where television cast members from the past are reunited to talk about their experiences, and in some cases, reproduce their old roles. The same applies to the music business where “classic” popular musical acts reunite to satisfy people’s sense of nostalgia as if they were “back in the day” of a life gone by. High school reunions remain a popular American phenomenon and now have dedicated web sites that support communication between old friends well beyond the reunion event itself. The Internet also makes it easier to research one’s own family lineage through web sites such as Ancestry.com and Lineage.com providing ways for people to explore the history of their family and the roots of their own identity. These cultural phenomena create and circulate discourses of reunion that play into people’s desire to refriend.

Second, while the small sample size provided adequate data for an initial exploratory study, data from a larger sample might reveal generalizations across refriending accounts, comparing differences among age groups, cross-sex and same-sex friendships, as well as the different communication strategies people used in their refriending episodes. Quantitative methods would be useful in this direction in order to provide objective data that might predict, for example, people’s responses as a refriending partner, or whether or not certain friendships of the past will function in the present. Also, this study reported mostly on successful refriending accounts. Looking more closely at those particular friendship networks of individuals who avoid refriending experiences could shed light on how people choose and maintain certain relationships as well as the value they place on relational history. Future research should examine how communication unfolded in unsuccessful refriending episodes for comparison.

A third area of interest would be to examine the particular differences between men's and women's refriending experiences. For example, one female participant reported she and her friend experienced tension over who was responsible for not keeping in touch while another male participant expressed understanding of his friend not keeping in touch. Exploring how men and women handle the effects of time and distance as it pertains to the continuity of their friendship deserves a closer look.

Fourth, where a larger sample size would help in making generalizations, focusing on a single refriending account would also shed light on some of the personal nuances of this unique social experience. Here, an autoethnographer could report on her or his experience of refriending from their perspective as both friend and communication researcher. Because refriending does not typically occur as a single event, an (auto) ethnographer could develop a longitudinal study in order to track changes in the relationship over time rather than rely solely on retrospective accounts. Going even farther, an inventive autoethnographer might consider contacting a refriending target prior to the actual refriending event to secure their participation and approval of the project as well as make arrangements for recording their interactions. Such data would be most valuable, as it would provide the actual talk between refriending partners.

Finally, while the term refriending comes from the language circulating around the phenomenon of online social networking, this study was not exclusively centered on this particular context. Instead, the aim of this study was to gain an overall snapshot of the refriending experience as it unfolded within the context of the relationship. However, future research should focus on how Facebook (and other technologies) shape these interactions and the extent to which they serve a reconnected friendship. For example, a

study could examine people's preferences for initiating and maintaining their reconnected friendship using one communication channel over another (e.g. Facebook vs email), or their preference for synchronous or asynchronous communication, as well as the strategies they use to implement and maintain these preferences as an individual or collaborative effort. Beyond friendships, research could also focus on past romantic relationships where ex-romantic partners reconnect and interact from their status as single or married. A study could make comparisons between reconnected friendship and romantic relationships to examine the communication strategies and outcomes as they unfold online and what this means to them in their respective offline social worlds.

Conclusion

Friendship scholars have devoted much space to the development, maintenance, and deterioration of friendship, but this project adds yet another dimension to the friendship literature because it reveals how old friends communicatively redevelop a dormant friendship. The communication involved in this endeavor often mirrored that of redeveloping friendship, but went beyond this to reveal how the prior history shared between friends shaped these unfolding interactions. From a dialogic perspective, this study adds to the understanding of how past and present discourses of identity intertwine to move friendship forward (or backwards) after a period of relational dormancy. From a dialectical perspective, it shows how old friends communicatively worked through tension and contradiction tied to their roles as friend and stranger to the other.

In the opening chapter, the term *refriending* was conceptualized as “a process when two individuals whose interactive behavior and shared lived experiences that once characterized their friendship have reestablished contact and are interacting after an

extended period of communication dormancy.” After close examination of people’s refriending experiences, this definition, while providing a literal, if not somewhat mechanical meaning, does not fully capture the nuances that shape this personal yet common social experience. In one sense, refriending means catching up with an old friend to recap the prominent lived experiences that shaped lives so that the other may come to understand how both parties arrived at our present location. In another sense, refriending means revisiting a part of ourselves tied to this significant other once known as a close or best friend. The history shared with this person is not confined to the past but circulates in collaborative interactions to forge new meanings in the present.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

I am graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi conducting a study about friendship. Specifically, I am focusing on the experience of reconnecting with a good friend after a long period of being out of touch with this particular person. This reconnection event can happen in many ways, such as through a social networking site (e.g. Facebook), an email, phone call, or through a face-to-face encounter. This person may have contacted you, or perhaps you contacted them first, or maybe it was a chance encounter. I am looking for research participants to interview about their experience of reconnecting with a friend from their past. Your participation will remain anonymous. Please contact me through the email address provided below for more details. Thank you for your interest, and I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Talk about what your friendship was like with this person before your period of disconnect. How did you meet? In what ways were you both alike? How were you different? What were some of the qualities (e.g. trust, respect, shared experiences) that helped shape your friendship?

Talk about how and/or why you lost touch with your friend. Was this a gradual process or was there a specific reason that brought on the period of disconnect? Was there an effort on your part to contact your friend or to “keep tabs” on her or him through other people?

Talk about the absence of this friend from your life. What kind of things would activate your memory of this particular friend? After losing touch with this friend, in what ways, if at all, did your friendship with this person influence your relationship with others, and/or your life in general?

Talk about what motivated you to want to reconnect with this friend. Why, after your time of little to no communication, did you decide to reconnect with your friend? Were you simply satisfying curiosity or was there something more you wanted out of this reconnection? What hesitation(s), if any, did you have about reconnecting with this friend?

Talk about how you reconnected with this friend. Did you find each other through an on-line social networking site? Did your friend contact you first, or did you make the initial effort? Was the reconnection a series of emails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, perhaps a combination of these, or was it a single event?

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
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NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **12020702**

PROJECT TITLE: **Interpersonal (Re) Relating: Investigating the
Experience of Reconnecting Past Friendships**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

RESEARCHER/S: **Paul Edgerton Stafford**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**

DEPARTMENT: **Communication Studies**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **02/09/2012 to 02/07/2013**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

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